



# SHAKESPEARE SURVEY

under the general direction of

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Chairman of the Shakespeare Association

## II

# SHAKESPEARE IN FRANCE

## CRITICISM

# VOLTAIRE TO VICTOR HUGO

*The Harness Prize, 1922, was awarded  
to this work*

SHAKESPEARE IN FRANCE  
CRITICISM  
VOLTAIRE TO VICTOR HUGO

BY

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L O N D O N

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# SHAKESPEARE IN FRANCE

## INTRODUCTION

SHAKESPEARE has been dead for three hundred years; for the last century criticism has tended to become, as the late Sir Walter Raleigh said, a kind of auction, where the highest bidder, however extravagant, carries off the prize; and his fame is safe even in the countries of Voltaire and Tolstoy. In England that fame has known its vicissitudes: but, whether from insular prejudice, as foreigners believed, or from innate critical judgement, as we trust, Englishmen have been kinder to their greatest dramatist than foreign critics. He has survived the attacks of Puritanism and of the neo-classics. He will survive the democratic contempt of Tolstoy and Mr. Bernard Shaw. But every attack must be met, by those who stand both for sound criticism and for the paying of honour where it is due, by new weapons. Fortunately the armoury is well supplied. The genius of Shakespeare consists in not one achievement, but several. The formalists of the eighteenth century, if they admitted that Shakespeare's language was fantastic and his manners rude, countered by pointing to his unequalled knowledge of the human heart. Ardent Romantics like Hazlitt, who found the reactionary ideas of Coriolanus revolting, could escape to the fairy-tale fastnesses of old Belarius. And so to each adversary Shakespeare presents a new buckler; but his mightiest defence, the divine Hephaestian armour forged for him alone, his defenders seldom bring into play, while his adversaries not only ignore it but definitely deny its existence. Shakespeare was, first and foremost, a dramatist. There have been

other poets : Shakespeare himself cannot precede Homer ; there have been other philosophers, there have been others who have found their way into fairyland or down to Hell. But no dramatist can be placed alongside him. No other human being has expressed so completely, so perfectly, in the highest of all forms of art, the whole stuff of art. This is not to say that it is as a mere technician that we revere Shakespeare. As an imaginative genius—the rock on which his fame must always rest—he has long been hailed. It is not so long since his superb mastery of his chosen medium was fully recognized—if indeed it is so now, when critics can still speak of Shakespearean drama as ‘loosely constructed’. But it is exactly there that he was pre-eminent, that he towered above all rivals. Dramatic art we can admire but not adore : of the qualities that evoke adoration Shakespeare has plenty ; but our admiration is focussed upon that quality by which he stands alone—the perfection of his dramatic art. It may perhaps be of interest to observe the appreciation of this, as of his other qualities, in France, the nation which, according to one of its greatest writers, has produced a national drama superior to all others—not excluding Athens.

The course of Shakespeare’s reputation in France during those three centuries may be roughly stated in three sentences. “For a hundred years he was unknown ; for a hundred years he was despised ; for a hundred years he was adored. Over him have raged the fiercest critical struggles in French literary history ; in that battle have stood forth, each dominating the century in which he lived, two of the greatest writers that France has produced—Voltaire and Victor Hugo. These two names are written large across the history of Shakespeare in France. And now their historian, with his duty of impartiality, must come

Between the pass and fell incensed points  
Of mighty opposites.

## I

### BEFORE VOLTAIRE

DURING the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the influence exerted by French upon English literature was reciprocated hardly at all. The outburst of energy and curiosity which accompanied the Reformation and the Renaissance in all countries led Englishmen to the study of foreign literature; but while in England a centralized despotism produced peace at home and yet retained a large measure of personal liberty—conditions suitable for the production of a national literature—in France the sixteenth century was a period of intermittent strife embittered by religious hatred. Turmoil never produces art until it is quelled. The literature of France awaited the strong hand of Richelieu.

The drama of the two countries owed its origin to the same sources; but the continuity of the various forms, which in England amalgamated to produce a native drama owing little to foreign or to purely literary influence, was broken in France by the suppression of Miracle Plays in 1548; and the vitality of English country life, where festivity was the common ground on which all classes met, was in France very faintly paralleled. In the circumstances, French drama could never be so national and vigorous a thing as English under Elizabeth. At the end of the century there was only one theatre in Paris. On this stage romanticism reigned supreme: but, as in England, classicism already claimed its adherents among the dramatists, though not in their audiences. Garnier and Grévin could not get their plays performed: Jodelle

had no better fortune, though his conception of decorum, which allowed Cleopatra to pull Seleucus by the hair, would have shocked Boileau, and though two hundred years later he was classed with Hardy, his contemporary and the greatest figure of the time in French drama, as a symptom of the barbarism from which France had risen. Romantic drama in France showed many of the traits of the English Elizabethans: contemporary history is staged by Calprenède, horrors of the Kydian type by de la Serre, and Marlowean rhodomontade by Cyrano de Bergerac. Moreover, these Romantics, unlike the Englishmen, had their dramatic theories: d'Urfé defended blank verse, Schelandre and Ogier rejected the doctrines of the unities and formalism. Yet even these plays show an admixture of classicism. In chronicle plays, many of which related almost contemporary history, the use of a chorus and a Messenger's speech was common. It seems probable that the genius of the French nation inclines naturally to classicism—to the formal tragedy, appealing less directly and powerfully to its audience than the freer and more vigorous Romantic drama. If so, the influence of the Spanish and English drama in France was largely discounted. The former might have exercised a greater influence than the latter, for Lope de Vega was known and admired by men who had never heard of Shakespeare. But both came too late. The marvellous rapidity with which English drama sprang to perfection made it impossible for foreigners to fall under its influence during its dazzling maturity in the first decade of the seventeenth century; Shakespeare, during his lifetime, was almost certainly unknown in France, in spite of the parallelisms which have been found in his French contemporaries; and by 1630 the opportunity had passed. The classicists, led by Mairêt, had conquered; Corneille's half-hearted struggles for romanticism were overborne; and by 1637

Romantic ideas had become the stock-in-trade of the theatrical satirist. The current set away from Shakespeare. The eyes of France were no longer turned in the direction of the Romantic drama; and he had to wait for recognition for the youthful enthusiasm of his bitterest enemy—Voltaire. —

The statement frequently made by Voltaire that he was the discoverer of Shakespeare to France has been repeated by many critics down to Professor Lounsbury; but M. Jusserand has shown that it is not precisely true. The first mention of his name in France seems to be a note appended by Nicolas Clément, the librarian, to a copy of the Second Folio, which was in the Royal Library, not later than 1675. As this is the first of all known criticisms of Shakespeare in France, it is perhaps worth quoting: 'This English poet has a beautiful imagination, his thoughts are natural, and his expression fine: but these good qualities are obscured by the filth which he introduces into his comedies.' Clément, as we shall see, set the tone to the next 150 years; the only notable point is his moderation in restricting the scope of his second sentence to the comedies. The Surintendant Fouquet also had a copy of Shakespeare's works, but has left no criticism. Shakespeare was named among the principal poets of England in Baillet's *Jugement des Savants*, 1688: and Muralt, writing in 1695, calls him 'one of their best ancient poets'. These passing references become commoner after the end of the century. The *Journal des Savants* in 1708 calls him 'the most famous of English poets for tragedy', and to the translation of a few numbers of the *Spectator* issued in 1714 there is a note which also mentions the tragedies favourably, though in a manner which shows the writer knew little of Shakespeare. These two commendations of the tragedies give interest to this remark of Moreau de Brasey, writing in 1712: 'Shakespeare...



has left the reputation of a master owing to his excellent historical plays.' The vogue of the histories, great in Shakespeare's lifetime, waned markedly after the Restoration, and apart from Cibber's version of *Richard III* they were seldom seen on the stage at this period; La Place's selection, which Professor Thorndike takes to have represented accurately English taste in 1740-50, contained only two—*Richard III* and *Henry VI*, Part III. What the 'reputation of a master' meant is indicated by a passing reference made by Montesquieu when in England in 1730. The Queen and Lord Chesterfield were discussing why the language of Shakespeare's heroines is so unsuccessful: Montesquieu—who probably took this information, such as it was, on trust—thought it was because this art can be acquired only by familiarity with refined manners, which is less necessary for the portrayal of heroes. We shall find this criticism repeated later on.

The only serious effort after knowledge of Shakespeare was made by De La Roche, who, in the *Journal Littéraire* of the Hague, in 1717, gave an account of English poetry and drama, with details of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Richard III*, and *Henry VI*. His criticism is, of course, neo-classic in tone: his most interesting remark is this, that Shakespeare does not seem to have educed from the nature of tragedy any rules to replace those of the ancients. Clearly to a neo-classic it is impossible to write tragedy without definite rules. To us it seems equally impossible that the dramatist can perceive the difficulties, the possibilities, the requirements of his form until he has actually written a play—by which time he no longer needs rules to tell him how to do so. The laws which govern Shakespearean drama were probably unknown to Shakespeare; they are to be found by the critic, not followed by the creator: but De La Roche desired Shakespeare to be both, and, moreover, to be the critic first and the creator afterwards.

## II

### THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (1734-1778)

UP to this point our inquiry has been merely, whether any one in France had heard of Shakespeare. Criticism is impossible where knowledge is so meagre. During the two past centuries there have been four phases of the struggle round Shakespeare, of roughly equal duration. For the first fifty years Voltaire is the centre of the conflict. From his death in 1778 to the opening of the Romantic revival in drama, beginning about 1820, a pause ensues, during which isolated opinions are expressed on either side—a period which to us, in spite of the continued official adherence to neo-classic ideas, seems always the calm before the storm. From 1820 to about 1870 we are once more in the thick of the fray, watching the belated Romantic triumph; fifty years remain after 1870.

We have seen that Voltaire's claim to the discovery of Shakespeare is not founded on fact; the credit should be given to De La Roche. But if we argue by effect there is more to be said for Voltaire. He was one of those men who could not help being in the limelight, even when he did not himself turn it on. Other men might be ignored while saying that which, in Voltaire's mouth, awoke Europe. De La Roche may deserve, but Voltaire must receive, the honour of being Shakespeare's sponsor on the Continent.

In this context it is fortunately necessary to deal with only one side of Voltaire's innumerable activities. Champion of liberty as he was all his life long, he denied it to

one sphere only—the drama ; and that only in advancing age. The play of his youth, *Mariamne*, contained a death on the stage, which was so badly received that Voltaire was compelled to expunge it from the second edition. This was in 1724, the year before Voltaire came to England. The three years which he spent here opened his eyes to many novelties, and the most striking was Shakespeare. He was in the thirties, at the height of his powers, and the iconoclasm of youth still coloured his dramatic theories. To us it is hardly possible to imagine the effect produced by sudden contact, at such a stage in our lives, with Shakespeare. Keats has told us what Homer was to him. Voltaire never forgot the spectacle of Brutus in the Forum : though it must be admitted that Antony seems to have left him cold.

His return to France in 1729 was quickly followed by a group of writings which, considered as a whole, place before us his outlook on Shakespeare and on the drama at this time. These are the prefaces to the plays of *Brutus* and *Oedipus* (2nd edition), the *Lettres philosophiques*, and the *Essay on Epic Poetry*. The prefaces are largely taken up with replies to the theories of La Motte, the great anti-classic of the time. Voltaire's moderation is here very remarkable. La Motte had demanded the use of prose for tragedy : 'It is a thing', says Voltaire, 'which, I believe, can never succeed.' This was the man who, forty years later, was to write to a friend who had told him of the production of a tragedy in prose, 'The world is going to end : Antichrist has come.' In 1730 he was not above arguing about his articles of dramatic faith. He justifies verse in tragedy by arguments of sound criticism, arguments which may be heard to-day not a hundred miles from Great St. Mary's. But he feels bound to admit that the freedom of English dramatic verse gives an advantage

over French drama: 'We walk in shackles', he says, but adds that rhyme, with all its faults, is absolutely essential to French poetry.

La Motte's main attack, and Voltaire's most vigorous defence, were of course around the unities. All the rules save these are 'a little arbitrary' and ought to admit of exceptions, as in Greek tragedy; but the unities are 'the fundamental laws of the theatre', and are deduced from Reason, 'which must triumph at last'. Moreover, to violate the unities is to abandon probability; whereas any violation of decorum can be carried off if the language has been raised to a sufficient pitch. This is one of those casual remarks which show that Voltaire, like Johnson, was, at bottom, a great critic. He has here found the reason for such scenes as that of the Porter in *Macbeth*, a problem that defeated even Coleridge. On the unities, of course, Voltaire could never argue fairly. The idea of an inviolable rule coloured all his writings on the subject; but even here he is clear-sighted enough to perceive the true advantages which may be attained by the unity of time, and to realize that the true unity is attained by no arbitrary period of twenty-four hours, but by exact correspondence between time of action and time of representation. Whatever any one may think about this time-worn subject, every one must admit that Voltaire has found the only argument by which it can be supported.

The preface to *Brutus* contains an interesting examination of the faults, as they appeared to Voltaire, of the English stage. English authors have one and all lacked the purity, the decorum, and the perfection of art found in France. The criticism was inevitable; but Voltaire nevertheless considered that French tragedy went to the other extreme: it is too often 'rather conversations than the representation of an event', while in England the 'most

irregular pieces have great merit with regard to the action'. It seems that Voltaire is here groping through neo-classic mists after a true dramatic principle—that the foundation of great drama is the development of action. As we shall see, Voltaire was troubled all his life by the impression which his personal experience gave him, that in the essentials of drama Shakespeare was supremely successful; and at this period he was still able partially to perceive what those essentials were. He could still say that, though he did not approve the barbarities of *Julius Caesar*, he was only surprised, in view of the ignorance of Shakespeare, 'who had no instructor save his own genius', and his epoch, that there were no more. Moreover—and this would have been flat blasphemy to the later Voltaire—these barbarities are only a matter of custom, and French taste has become impossibly effeminate. The scenes of Greek drama—such as the terrible scene of the rousing of the Eumenides by the ghost of Clytemnestra—would have been hissed off the French stage; but while the Greeks and English pass from tragedy into mere horror, the French frequently fail to reach a tragic height at all. Whether Voltaire was absolutely sincere in avowing to Bolingbroke that French drama needed more action and less of the eternal love-intrigue is perhaps doubtful, but his dramatic practice shows that he regarded the bounds of the stage as too restricted. Yet his conclusion was that the French principle, though perhaps carried too far, was right. The immortality of a play, he considers, depends on its poetry: an interesting spectacle is easier to produce than great poetry, and is, indeed, what the English prefer. This may be doubted, for it appears easy enough to write a fine dramatic poem which is quite unactable. Moreover, Voltaire fails to perceive that the true beauty of dramatic

poetry is that it is dramatic: how much less would be the glory of Horatio's words

But look! the morn, in russet mantle clad,  
Walks o'er the dew on yon high eastern hill,

without the darkness and terror from which they relieve us?

It should now be clear that Voltaire was not initially in a position to appreciate Shakespeare. In the circumstances his criticism is distinctly eulogistic. The opening paragraph of his discourse on English Tragedy gives his whole point of view. 'Shakespeare was the creator of the English theatre. . . . His genius was at once strong and abundant, natural and sublime, but without the smallest spark of taste and void of the remotest knowledge of the rules.' Taking the words in the sense Voltaire intended—that is, that 'taste' means the particular form of taste led by Louis XIV, and the 'rules' those laws which Aristotle was supposed to have laid down—this is precisely true, all save the first sentence. This is a common misconception. Though *Gorboduc* was known in France almost at this period, Marlowe seems to have been entirely ignored until recent times; Voltaire, however, in this same essay pays him an unconscious tribute, in complaining that the style of English drama is too full of Asiatic bombast. It was Marlowe, not Shakespeare, that Voltaire should have blamed for the corruption of English taste in tragedy—if indeed it was necessary to blame anybody. The only praise that Voltaire can bestow on Shakespeare—and, to be fair, he does it unreservedly—is for single scenes and passages. He argues that the prevalent contempt for Shakespeare in France—a feeling based on his plays considered as wholes, and thereby, according to Voltaire, justified and sound—blinds Frenchmen to his great beauties.

It is easy', he adds, 'to recount in prose the absurdities of a poet, but very difficult to translate his fine verses.' In view of Voltaire's future conduct, this remark—excellently true as it is—sounds strange in his mouth. His mission he now conceived to be to show the beauties of Shakespeare to those who only knew his faults. Hamlet's soliloquy is the example selected for translation. English tragedies, 'almost always barbarous, void of decency, order or probability, have yet, amidst the night of darkness, their splendid days of light', and this is one.

Now as ever Voltaire is troubled by the patent fact that English neo-classics, even after purging the stage of the barbarities of Shakespeare, failed to equal him. Addison's *Cato* was to him a perfect tragedy, save for the introduction of a love-intrigue—it seems hard that Addison should be censured for this, in which he merely followed the acknowledged masters—but in power he clearly did not place it beside *Hamlet*. Indeed, the paradox presented by the success of the barbaric Shakespeare as compared with the refined Addison, led him to a conclusion as devastating to neo-classicism as Johnson's famous appeal 'from criticism to nature'. 'The poetic genius of the English', says Voltaire, 'is, up to now, like a bushy tree planted by Nature, throwing out a thousand branches and growing unsymmetrically with strength. It dies if you try to force its nature and to clip it like one of the trees in the Marly gardens. . . . Such is the privilege of the creative genius; he makes himself a road where none has gone before; he travels without guide, art, or rule; he goes astray in his career, but leaves far behind him all those who have nothing but reason and precision. Of this M. Jusserand justly says that the Romantics of a century later would not have altered a word; but it is possible to read too much into it. Voltaire is not advocating this as a principle to be followed,

any more than Johnson did in the passage referred to. Both held, in spite of Shakespeare, that the true form of tragedy was that of Racine; but both were bound to admit that it was possible to obtain a nobler success by an entirely different form. If these two greatest men of their century had done nothing else, they had deserved immortality for thus stripping away the sophisms of the neo-classic theory.

Such were the earliest pronouncements of Voltaire on Shakespeare. The *Lettres philosophiques* met with the savage opposition which most of his works encountered; for he had, as usual, found an opportunity to attack the Church: and in addition he found himself the target of the patriotic Frenchmen who disliked to hear praise of a foreign author. The grim humour of this situation, contrasted with the conflict that raged round Voltaire forty years later, would have appealed to Victor Hugo's love of the grotesque. But it is very doubtful if his adversaries had any material on which to base their disagreement. It is true that in 1733 the Abbé Prévost had begun a series of articles with the intention of popularizing English literature. But it is almost certain that at this time, and indeed all his life, Voltaire knew much more of Shakespeare than all but a very few of his countrymen; and his knowledge was both sketchy and inaccurate. *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar* were the plays he knew best; away from these he was capable of making such amazing mistakes as his appointing Sir John Falstaff to the office of Lord Chief Justice, to which Falstaff's own comment is the only possible one, 'O rare! By the Lord, I'll be a brave judge!' Yet no one in France ever seemed sufficiently well informed to correct him, and it is a suspicious circumstance that Mercier, in 1773, draws his Shakespearean examples only from plays popularized by Voltaire. ~~Throughout~~



Voltaire's lifetime we shall not go far wrong in adopting his own view of himself as the leading French authority on Shakespeare. If he knew little, his compatriots, on the whole, knew less.

The *Lettres philosophiques* did, however, focus a certain amount of attention on Shakespeare, and two parties developed almost immediately. The Abbé Prévost, whom M. Jusserand names 'a born heretic', published in 1738 analyses of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and other plays, with entirely favourable comments, which justified Shakespeare in every direction. The Abbé Le Blanc represents the opposite point of view: like all the classicists, he is bound to admit the greatness of Shakespeare's poetry, but his irregularity damns him. A diverting side of neo-classicism is indicated by his complaint that the characters of *Julius Caesar* (the selection shows the influence of Voltaire) abuse each other so violently 'that you cannot take them for Romans'. It is always necessary to remember that to the neo-classic the entire population of Rome was composed of solemn and noble-minded persons expressing themselves in stately Ciceronian periods. How this squared with what is known of such men as Clodius and Catiline, is by no means clear. Between the two extremes we find Riccoboni's *Historical and Critical Reflections on the different Theatres of Europe*, 1738. Riccoboni was probably better acquainted with his subject than Voltaire, and he admired Shakespeare more than he dared to admit. His views were orthodox; but if one could throw aside the rules, he said—evidently assuming as the first article of faith that one could not—then English tragedy was the equal of any other. Indeed, the feeling hinted at by Voltaire, that the French system was too narrow, was on the increase. Doubts had been cast on the whole system as early as 1692, by Perrault, and culminated in 1754 with

the publication of La Motte's tremendous attack, the *Discours sur la Tragédie*, written thirty years earlier. Moreover the freedom of the stage found its outlet in opera, which, not being tragedy, had no rules, and which claimed no less an exponent than Boileau. In comedy the influence of Richardsonian 'sensibility' was beginning to be felt. Only in tragedy, though the poets half-heartedly advocated freedom, the audience would have no paltering with the rules, and all innovations suffered the same fate. The crowd brought on the stage by Voltaire in *Brutus* (1730) wrecked the play, which had only moderate success.

In this, as in most of Voltaire's dramatic work between 1730 and 1750, the influence of Shakespeare is clearly marked. He did all he could to obtain the striking effects he had seen produced in England by violent action. But this play failed also in England, as had Lee's tragedy on the same subject. The year 1732 saw two new plays by Voltaire—*Ériphyle* and *Zaïre*. *Ériphyle* shows strong efforts after sensationalism: Eriphyle's voice is heard at the moment of death, though she is killed behind the scenes, not on the stage. The play also contains a ghost clearly descended from Hamlet's father. *Zaïre* was modelled largely upon *Othello*, but it is, of course, Love, not Death, that dominates the drama, thus making it essentially different. Voltaire's indebtedness here is apparent to any one who knows Shakespeare—though the reminiscences of *Lear* which Professor Lounsbury finds in the play may be accidental—but as his preface merely acknowledged a general debt to English drama, not a particular one to Shakespeare, those people who perceived the plagiarism were not pleased. These were all Englishmen—no one in France knew enough to correct Voltaire—so the matter became in a sense a national one, and this little incident may have been one of the causes of the prejudice which so distorted the

Shakespearean conflict of the later years of Voltaire. The remainder of that preface seems to have escaped notice even in England, which is surprising: for Voltaire, in transforming *Othello* into *Zaire*, had observed another defect of English tragedy—the unsuccessful representation of love. This, no doubt, was partly due to popular taste, he thought: Voltaire, as we shall see, had a fixed idea that all Englishmen were practically impervious to any gentler feelings. But the real defect in this: ‘our [French] lovers speak as lovers, yours only as poets’. At first sight this antithesis appears illogical: we must remember that what Voltaire desires is not the language of real passion—which, as many critics have observed, tends generally to a poetic form—but the conventional language of artificial gallantry in vogue at the court of Louis XV. Hence anything approximating to the language of real passion—that is, to poetry—was out of place in representing passion. A man who can come out with such an opinion just after working on *Othello* deserves this *reductio ad absurdum*. Curiously enough, even Aaron Hill, who was making much noise at this time in England in opposition to Voltaire, did not contradict this: very likely he agreed with it, for it was about this time that William Collins, the author of the *Ode to Evening*, gave vent to what has been beautifully described as ‘the worst criticism ever passed on Shakespeare by any critic, living or dead or German’, in which he contrasted Shakespeare’s deficiency in female characterization with the greater success of Fletcher in this direction.

Voltaire had expressed a hope that the innovations he had introduced might lead to a freer type of French tragedy; and he published in 1743 a play which he had written about twelve years earlier, called *The Death of Caesar*. This was written in accordance with what he conceived to be English taste. Not only was there no love

interest, but there was no woman in the play at all. It was, in fact, to quote the advertisement of a play of the Revolutionary period, 'an austere and tragic picture of political crimes'. To add point to Shakespeare's plot, Brutus is discovered to be a natural son of Caesar, but he allows no filial tenderness to stand in the way of political principle. This addition Voltaire considered a masterstroke. The only emotions allowed were to be patriotism and love of liberty, for these, he had gathered from Shakespeare, were the dominant characteristics of England. Probably what caused this opinion was the relative unimportance of female characters in Shakespeare, for in forming this conclusion he could hardly have been acquainted with Cleopatra and Imogen: and in any case, even in *Julius Caesar*, the play he knew best, he entirely failed to perceive what the real subject of the play was—the rise and fall of Brutus—for he thought it a play of conspiracy. The spectacle of Voltaire hailing Shakespeare as the poet of liberty is a piquant contrast to Hazlitt's essay on *Coriolanus* and Tolstoy's attack.

The adaptation was free, as it had to be in order to compress *Julius Caesar* into the limits of neo-classic theory. The Forum scene was the last; and here Voltaire was more inferior to Shakespeare than anywhere else, for the climax of the scene was the announcement by Antony of Brutus' kinship to Caesar. The play naturally failed in France owing to its barbarity (besides, it had only three acts: Aristotle had laid it down that tragedy has five), and in England owing to the inevitable comparison with the original. Voltaire, however, was ready for his French critics: to those who censured him he replied that his aim was not amusement but instruction—he was informing France what English taste was; while if any one did praise it, his object was to add to French drama the good points of English.

In two further plays, *Mahomet* and *Sémiramis*, Voltaire made further depredations on Shakespeare, with results of some interest to the student of the two forms of drama. One of the incidents in *Mahomet* is based on the murder scenes from *Macbeth*. The fact that no one in France called attention to the source of this is eloquent testimony to the state of Shakespearean knowledge at the time: surely even a superficial acquaintance with the plays would include these scenes. It throws a light too upon Voltaire's claim to have familiarized France with Shakespeare before the appearance of the first translation—La Place's in 1745. The play (when the censorship removed the ban originally placed upon it) was very successful: but it is obvious that French tragedy did not lend itself to such a scene as that which immediately follows the murder of Duncan. A tragic scene may be great either by its lofty stateliness or by rapidity and extreme tension. It is unnecessary to decide on the relative merits of the two methods, but it is clear that they are mutually exclusive. In the *Agamemnon* Aeschylus employs the former method in the conclusion of the Cassandra scene, as Shakespeare does in the dying words of Hamlet and Othello: the opposite method is exemplified by the horrifying *στιχομυθία* of the crowning revelation in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and by Shakespeare's treatment of the murder scene in *Macbeth*. Now from French tragedy the latter method is practically excluded: the Racinian Alexandrine, a superb measure for stately tragedy, as the final scene of *Phèdre* shows, is incapable of the rapidity required for such a scene as this in *Macbeth*. Voltaire attempted to compress his material into a mould which simply would not contain it. His failure might have convinced him that the reforms he desired in French tragedy required a more fundamental revolution than he was prepared to advocate.

Voltaire's next play, *Sémiramis*, though in date preceded by La Place's translation, may be considered alongside his other plays of this period. It contained another ghost, deriving obviously from Hamlet's father; and as La Place's version was in the hands of his audience, Voltaire could not very well deny this, though he claimed that he derived the idea from the *Persae* of Aeschylus. (In a sense this was true, since all revengeful ghosts in tragedy may be traced to Clytemnestra in the *Eumenides*, who was preceded by Darius.) Voltaire in his preface attempted to justify his ghost from first principles, and thus gave Lessing an opportunity later to refute all his arguments. This preface contained a few inaccurate censures of *Hamlet*: now that he was no longer the only Shakespearean authority in France, Voltaire was losing his enthusiasm. The play itself, which was an attempt to fuse the ancient with Shakespearean tragedy, was remarkable mainly for its advance in scenic art. Scenic effects were sedulously cultivated, and actual scene-shifting was employed, for the action moved from place to place about the city of Babylon. This attempt—probably the first—at 'illusion', as the term is understood nowadays, resulted in the abolition, in 1759, of the seats occupied (as in Shakespeare's theatre) by men of fashion on the stage itself; and Collé, after this reform, remarked that 'the illusion is now complete'. For this reform at any rate France should be grateful to *Sémiramis*. As a play it was not a great success; Collé praised it, after a fashion, calling it 'bad Voltaire'. The attempt to fuse the plots of *Oedipus* and *Hamlet* was unsuccessful, and Voltaire's preparation for the ghost's appearance, restricted as he was by the stately manner of French tragedy, could not hope to approach Shakespeare's marvellous opening scene.

During those fifteen years other dramatists had been

led by Voltaire's example to tentative imitation of Shakespeare. Gresset's *Édouard III* contains a murder in full view; and Hénault, in the *Nouveau Théâtre Français François II, Roi de France*, openly admits that his method is derived from that of 'Shakespear'. In the preface which invariably precedes eighteenth-century plays, he makes some interesting comments upon this author. While condemning, as he was bound to do, his 'coarseness and extravagance', he cannot restrain his admiration for him; but our respect for his taste is sensibly diminished by his selection, for special praise, of *Henry VI*, which he admired particularly as a superb presentation of history. It was this play that he had tried to imitate. In doing so he found it necessary, of course, to introduce characters not of noble birth, a rash act in France, though he did not descend the social scale so far as Shakespeare had done. He also violated the unity of time; but he explains gravely that he has done everything possible to avoid this, since the play only covers seventeen months, while Francis II actually reigned for thirty-two years. It does not appear whether the absurdity of this argument occurred to the champions of orthodoxy; but the men who had admitted the possibility of the imagination bridging twenty-four hours, but not forty-eight, deserved a disciple like Hénault. But the most valuable portion of the preface is a brief tribute to Shakespeare's beauties, 'particularly when writing in prose'. Not only is this the first notice in France of Shakespeare's genius in prose, but it is very doubtful if any English critic of the time had perceived as much; indeed, as Sir J. Forbes-Robertson has said, it is not generally realized even to-day, by people who habitually speak of Shakespeare as if he was a poet and nothing else, what a large proportion of *Hamlet* is in prose. For a Frenchman, obsessed with the conception of tragic dignity

expressed in noble verse, to perceive Shakespeare's genius in those very scenes in which he stands most firmly on the solid ground of ordinary—and often vulgar—life, argues a critical acumen beyond anything we should have expected to observe in Hénault, or, indeed, in any of his contemporaries.

The work of Pierre La Place is a landmark in the history of Shakespeare in France, for though he cannot be said to have translated Shakespeare, it was in effect the first attempt to bring his works to the knowledge of Frenchmen. In the eight volumes published between 1746 and 1749, twenty-three English plays were treated; of these ten were by Shakespeare, one by Beaumont and Fletcher, and the remainder Restoration plays. The only comedy in the list was the *Merry Wives*: the other Shakespearean plays were *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Timon*, *Cymbeline*, *Henry VI*, Part III, and *Richard III*. The predominance of tragedy is very marked: in spite of Johnson, Shakespeare's comedies were far less popular than his tragedies. La Place found Shakespeare more popular than he expected; he had originally devoted only two volumes to him, and these were presently supplemented by two further volumes. Of most of the plays in his review he gave only a synopsis, interpolated with full translations of the more important scenes.

The preface in which La Place presented English drama to the French public was distinctly heterodox, as in the circumstances it was bound to be. His main plea, with which he met all objections, was based on Shakespeare's continued popularity in his own country. Even if Frenchmen disliked and despised Shakespeare, it would be of interest to them to know something of an author who was always able, at any rate, to arouse strong interest. This



dilemma, as we have seen, had already occurred to Voltaire, and continued to trouble him nearly all his life; he felt it to be the chink in his armour, as indeed it was. Great and temporary popularity may be no sign of genius, but it is always a subject worth the attention of a critic, however low his opinion is of the author in question; there have been times when critics have been wrong, as Jeffreys was about Keats, and (to make a bold statement) no critic has a right to condemn without real examination any work which has given pleasure to many people, however uncritical. When, as in the case of Shakespeare in 1750, all classes of a nation have agreed to admire for 150 years, the adverse critic's position is even more precarious, and La Place's argument is, in fact, unanswerable.

He stood on more dangerous ground in arguing from it the conclusion which Voltaire had never faced. Shakespeare's example, he thought, would teach Frenchmen that there were ways of pleasing an audience other than those they knew. This well illustrates La Place's guarded manner: the suggestion is merely that the neo-classic system, true though it is, may not be a complete code of tragedy. He proceeded, however, to unpardonable opinions: he justified the alternation of prose, blank verse, and rhyme, which, besides being natural, makes monotony impossible; and admired Shakespeare's use of contrast, by which the background of his picture is occasionally thrown into relief, thus adding new life to the whole. La Place is here thinking of double plots; and had he worked out his theme, he might have been the first to perceive the greatness of Shakespeare's art as displayed, for example, in *Henry IV*. But to his critics La Place's argument was shocking, for it amounted to a justification of Shakespeare's mingling of the comic and tragic elements.

But worse was to come. With an insight that would be

prophecy if it had less sound evidence behind it, he warns his country not to blame what their descendants may unreservedly applaud: and imagines as possible—without advocating as desirable—the disappearance of the unities. ‘Are the bounds of genius known to us?’ he asks, echoing the youthful Voltaire of the *Lettres philosophiques*. The prophetic fire actually descends upon him as he proceeds to imagine the discovery (already made in the novel) of a new style, ‘which will lead to minute studies of the heart of a kind unknown to us’, and the introduction of ‘new rules, sanctioning new enjoyments’: for, he adds, we have no more reason to believe that all is known of human nature than we have for a similar belief in the field of science. The humility of the true thinker is perceptible here—the feeling of Goethe’s Faust, who found that all we can know is that we know nothing; and it is a quality all too rare in the confident eighteenth century. Moreover, as M. Jusserand remarks, La Place has predicted with astonishing accuracy the future strength and importance of the novel, and the influence it was destined to exert upon the drama.

La Place had done all he could in conscience do to satisfy the orthodox critics: alongside his tentative praise of Shakespeare he included the perennial criticisms of his faults; and his only real attack on the rules was put into the mouth of a nameless Englishman, who, as Professor Lounsbury suggests, was most probably a cover for La Place’s own opinions which he dared not acknowledge. But the critics were not satisfied, for in addition to justifying the mixture of tones, La Place was far from sound on the essential question of the unities. The disapproval of his sternest critic—Voltaire—was increased by further considerations. It is impossible to acquit Voltaire entirely of personal feeling in his controversies about Shakespeare: up to now he had posed, with some reason, as the sole

sponsor of Shakespeare in France, and La Place's work, besides infringing what Voltaire considered to be his own monopoly, demolished this claim by showing how little Voltaire had really told his countrymen about Shakespeare; and in addition it enabled them to verify, or more often to refute, Voltaire's statements about Shakespeare, and to perceive the plagiarisms from him which Voltaire had not thought fit to acknowledge. Voltaire's annoyance found vent in the accusation that La Place, by omitting the passages which would have been most shocking to French taste, had falsified the total impression of Shakespeare. The accusation was an extraordinarily foolish one, for Voltaire had himself supplied the answer in the *Lettres philosophiques*: it was his business, he said then (and it was equally La Place's now), to inform his countrymen of Shakespeare's beauties, since of his faults they were fully aware.

Whatever faults La Place's work showed as a translation, the honour due to every pioneer in any worthy field must be paid to him; moreover, he had a real enthusiasm for Shakespeare, and his criticism is of no mean kind. Historians have not been over-kind to La Place, but the fairness and the open mind he displays, to the neo-classics as to Shakespeare, are equally rare among the heretics and the orthodox of French dramatic theory.

The battle was now fairly set. La Place's work was the first move in the long literary contest which culminated in Voltaire's letter read to the Academy in 1776. It may sound ridiculous to speak of a battle in this connexion, but the authority for it is good—it is that of Voltaire himself, who gradually began to regard his own struggles against Shakespeare's ascendancy as somehow bound up with the fortunes of France in her wars all over the world during this period. So extravagant are some of Voltaire's actions

during this period that it is almost impossible to take them seriously. That he was serious there can be no doubt; and it is a distasteful task to hold such a man as Voltaire up to ridicule. His criticisms, as Johnson said, were often petty; but the mind was not a petty one; and in judging Voltaire only by the ludicrous excitement he displayed about Shakespeare, we are apt to give this trait in his character too much prominence, and to forget that we are dealing with the greatest genius of his age.

La Place had chosen his moment well: interest in England and its literature was growing in France. Habits distinctively English—such as the discussion of politics by all kinds of people, a trait of English life which had astonished Voltaire considerably—were becoming commoner. The advent of Richardson, the founder of the school of ‘sensitivity’, furthered the tendency towards Anglomania: this was already imminent enough to be the subject of popular jokes, and in 1750 D’Argenson said, ‘Anglomania is gaining upon us’. Richardson sprang into fame on the Continent with a rapidity only equalled by Byron sixty years later, and Prévost, heretical as ever, and La Place issued translations of English novels. Yet this and the interest in England were in fact only symptoms of a much deeper revolution. The age of Louis XIV was fast passing away. The whole system, of manners as much as of government in Church and State, was crumbling: France was beginning to feel—inarticulately as yet—the need for some new outlook. ‘Sensitivity’ gave it her, and supported with extravagant admiration by such powerful influences as Rousseau and Diderot, found expression in the doctrines of the brotherhood of all men and of man’s union with Nature, which was to produce the artificial naturalism of the Petit Trianon. The seeds of revolution were being sown; but revolution was destined to take forty years to travel from politics to

tragedy. During these thirty years, 1745-76, two parallel processes are taking place: in Paris the new feelings of Anglomania and 'sensibility' are growing up and wearing themselves out; at Ferney, Voltaire, not closely in touch with the whole trend of French opinion, is passing gradually into the bitterness of old age, his retirement punctuated by periodical onslaughts on Shakespeare. Paris and Voltaire may be considered separately.

The work of Abbé Le Blanc, a staunch upholder of the rules, may be regarded as a preliminary skirmish of the great battle. He published in 1751 a work called *The Supplement of Genius, or the Art of Composition of Dramatic Poems, as practised by many celebrated Authors on the English stage*. The essay was a satire, something in the manner of Swift, and purported to be a manual of the construction of plays like Shakespeare's. It is a pity that this line of attack on Shakespeare was never employed by Voltaire, whose matchless irony would have made of it a terrible weapon. Le Blanc had been annoyed by the fact, that just as English drama was adapted in France to the restrictions of the French stage, so French drama was adapted in England to the freer English manner. Moreover, Shadwell claimed to have improved Molière 'very much' in adaptation; and Whitehead's *Roman Father*, a perversion of Corneille's *Horace*, was a great success in England. All this added gall to Le Blanc's pen. He knew English drama well, and, as we shall see, had perceived the method, though not the art, of Shakespeare's dramatic construction.

The young author, advises Le Blanc, should take a good plot from Corneille or Racine, then complicate it by introducing a large number of characters, and, mingling comedy and tragedy indiscriminately, make the whole turgid after Shakespeare's manner. It is not clear here

whether Le Blanc dislikes intricacy of plot, or multiplication of characters, or both. Perhaps he thought the two were inseparable, but the study of Racine's *Andromaque* or *Iphigénie* might have told him that a master dramatist can complicate a plot with very few characters. Indeed the accusation of intricacy was very rash, in view of the manner in which Racine has complicated the simple story of *Phèdre* by the introduction of *Aricie*, or that of *Iphigénie* by the part of *Eriphyle*. The second act, he continues, should contain a big stage-effect—say a pile of plague-corpses;—this is, for satire, an allowable criticism on Elizabethan drama, though hardly on Shakespeare;—and the fourth, which will probably tend to be dull, should be enlivened by another, preferably a battle, to be modelled on that of Agincourt in *Henry V*. This casual remark about the dullness of the fourth act shows that Le Blanc had perceived something of Shakespeare's method of construction; though he fails, of course, to perceive the reason for the comparative quiet of the fourth act, in which the counteraction, arising from the climax in the third act, is developing towards the catastrophe in the fifth. Le Blanc generally seems to have *Hamlet* in his mind, and this is, of course, one of the most striking examples of this method. Further advice follows for effective incidents: ghosts or other supernatural marvels would be an added beauty; Shakespeare's vulgar language in such scenes should be imitated.—Clearly Le Blanc, like his contemporaries, was so much disgusted by the conversation of Bernardo and Francisco that he could not perceive the dramatic greatness of the scene.—The deserted heroine should go mad at some point in the play; the effect of this, Le Blanc remarks ironically, will be tremendous, since the spectators will weep when she laughs, and laugh when she weeps. The first of these statements is

true, and (as Shakespeare foresaw) the suggestions of comedy in Ophelia's madness are the most poignant strokes of tragedy in the whole situation; but the second is not true, to us at least. The eighteenth century seems to have been more callous than we are in certain ways; the deformity of Richard III is to us either pitiful or disgusting, never ridiculous as it was to Mme. de Staël; and the spectacle of madness is never truly amusing, for our common humanity revolts from the degradation of human nature. We find it as difficult to laugh at madness as at the sight of a blind man stumbling over an obstacle. Indeed, so strong is this feeling, that W. S. Gilbert's attempt to burlesque theatrical madness, in *Ruddigore*, failed as burlesque, because the aversion from such a spectacle was greater than the amusement evoked by the author's irony. Le Blanc's criticism, then, may have been sound in reference to the manners of the time: and, to be frank, it may be doubted whether the Elizabethan audience was sufficiently tender-hearted to perceive tragedy in what was apparently amusing; but that Shakespeare did, there can be no question.

Le Blanc adds, finally, that the catastrophe should involve every one alike, but disaster should fall on the guilty first. He evidently approved of the French tragedy with its happy ending: though he had the perfectly clear pronouncement of Aristotle himself on the other side. Proceeding to comedy, he emphasizes the importance of indecency, which has the high moral effect of making young men beware of bad women. It is not clear whether he has in mind Elizabethan or Restoration comedy: the criticism certainly seems more applicable to the latter. It will be observed, in general, that almost all his criticisms seem to refer to *Hamlet*: even to a Frenchman whose acquaintance with Shakespeare was well above the average,

this play was assumed to give all that it was necessary to know about Shakespeare. The criticisms are for the most part of more importance for their amusing form than for any great originality.

A pronouncement at once of greater weight and of finer judgement was the criticism contained in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopædia*, which began to appear in 1751. The article on English tragedy was entrusted to the Chevalier de Jaucourt, a Frenchman who was well acquainted with English literature and had spent three years at Cambridge. His criticism is similar to that of Voltaire's youth; and Diderot's partiality for the new developments in art, particularly the school of sensibility, made him sympathetic to Shakespeare, so that we may assume that he approved Jaucourt's advanced views. Jaucourt's critical insight was keen, and he bases his judgement not so much on a single play as on the general characteristics of several. This was a distinct advance. Nevertheless it is clear that he owes a good deal to Voltaire, whom he follows in his opening remark,— 'Shakespeare created the English theatre'. Amid the praises which most Frenchmen now offered the genius and natural qualities of Shakespeare—though it should be added that Jaucourt's enthusiasm is unusually great—appears an interesting appreciation, the first in France, of Shakespeare's power of characterization. We find in Shakespeare, says Jaucourt, a prodigious variety of characters, 'all so well contrasted that no speech could be transferred from one to another'. In this, says Jaucourt, he excels 'all the world's poets'. This use of the word poet, where we should say dramatist, is characteristic of the time and country: the eighteenth century—even Jaucourt, an open-minded critic—never supposed that a man could be a dramatist without being a poet, and most



poets in France turned their activities to the stage. The criticism itself, beside the credit due to the high degree of appreciation it displays, is valuable for the importance it gives to a quality not admired, indeed rather discountenanced, by neo-classicism. To the formalist all that was necessary was that a man's language should be that of his dramatic type—king, peasant, faithful retainer, and so on. Hence the language of Pistol would be a definite violation of decorum just as much as is that of Casca : each assumed the language of a type other than his own. Jaucourt's criticism implies a censure of decorum and an approval of the natural characterization which Voltaire condemned and Johnson defended.

Jaucourt conceives Shakespeare to be a poet—here, again, he evidently means 'dramatist'—by instinct, not by instruction or training; of course, only later scholarship, by deciding the chronology of the plays, has made it possible for us to perceive how Shakespeare's art developed with years and dramatic experience. His plays, 'otherwise monstrous', says Jaucourt (again echoing Voltaire), contain such excellent scattered scenes that they always succeed : for example, the description of Cleopatra's meeting with Antony on the Cydnus (the selection shows Jaucourt's familiarity with the plays); Hamlet's soliloquy, as translated by Voltaire, is also selected for special praise; and Jaucourt mentions too the superb effect of the ghost in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's ghosts, fairies, and other supernatural characters, talk a curious mixture of the grave and the bizarre, so that we can hardly believe in them, says Jaucourt; but, he goes on to say, as we have no rule by which to judge such conceptions, 'we feel bound to admit that if such creatures did live on earth, they would talk and act as Shakespeare makes them do'. The whole passage appears self-contradictory; Jaucourt starts by

rebellling, with eighteenth-century rationalism, against marvels of any kind; but the qualification, which goes deeper, is a repetition of Aristotle's theory of 'probable impossibility'.

In general, Shakespeare 'paints all he sees, and beautifies almost all he paints'. His defect is, that he lacks selection. The admiration of the spectator can never be sustained, since a sublime scene is followed by a low and detestable one. The criticism is an orthodox one; but in qualifying it Jaucourt is as heretical as were the *Lettres philosophiques*. 'Shakespeare', he says, 'is like a Gothic building, grand, vast, and various, but inelegant.' Times had changed since Boileau used the term 'Gothic' as a general term of abuse. English drama had always excelled, Jaucourt thought, by its occasional beauties, 'astounding flashes in the midst of the darkness' of disorder, indecency, and improbability; and all Shakespeare's defects are more than excused by the ignorance of his times—for instance, his tendency (already noted by Voltaire) towards Asiatic bombast; and, in any case, his language, Jaucourt was bound to admit, elevated the spirit, 'though by an irregular path'.

It has been often stated that the *Encyclopaedia* makes the first stand against Voltaire's criticism of Shakespeare. This view, I think, is one that cannot be completely accepted. The general lines of this criticism bear a considerable resemblance to Voltaire's early pronouncements; only Jaucourt shows more discrimination, and has given more thought to those qualities which he admired in Shakespeare. His censures, however, are those of Voltaire; and he does not hint, as La Place did, at the possibility of the Shakespearean type of drama being equal or superior to that of Racine; indeed, his general criticism of English drama shows that he, like all his

contemporaries, had failed to discover any dramatic form in Shakespeare's plays—as we have seen, that staunch formalist, the Abbé Le Blanc, had gone nearer than any one else to this discovery. Moreover, Voltaire had at this period barely assumed the role of his later years. La Place's work had indeed roused his ire, and from now onwards he was steadily passing into the state of mind which was reflected in his last writings about Shakespeare; but his attack was much later than this, and his chief adversary in France was to be not the Encyclopaedists but Le Tourneur.

The effect of La Place's translation was not long in showing itself. Interest in Shakespeare increased, and fanatical admirers began to be heard: Patu planned in 1755 a history of English literature, owing to his admiration for Shakespeare's 'marvellous genius'. Garrick had appeared in Paris in 1751, acting Shakespeare in dumb-show with immense success, which was repeated fourteen years later; and Fréron, in the *Journal Étranger*, gave high praise to *Romeo and Juliet* as adapted by Garrick (without the catastrophe). This periodical, under the editorship of Prévost, had in 1754 quoted, in the original, select passages from three plays probably unknown to Frenchmen till that time—*All's Well*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *As You Like It*. The increasing interchange of ideas between the two countries, shown in the enthusiastic reception accorded in Paris to English writers—Hume, Chesterfield, Walpole—had its effect in directing attention to Shakespeare; and the steady progress of the sensibility school weakened the domination of the neo-classic system. Even the stage, the last refuge of the old order, began to feel the new ideas: the way had been opened for attempts, tentative at first, in the direction of greater naturalism of presentation and acting. The appearance

of Mme. Clairon with bare arms, in Voltaire's *Orphelin de Chine*, was an audacious innovation; but the substitution of natural acting for the old declamatory style, though supported by Diderot, met with no success, and Mme. du Deffand condemned it on the ground that it was not acting at all—'Mme. Clairon and M. Le Kain . . . play according to their nature and condition, and not according to that of the personage they represent'. It is not clear what this 'natural acting' was; if her statement about it is correct, Mme. du Deffand is quite right to censure it, and her criticism might with advantage be brought to the notice of many leading figures on the English stage to-day.

The whole form of drama was changing also. The growth of sensibility brought with it a tendency to unite comedy and tragedy, and a new form, in which characters not of exalted station filled the main roles, made its appearance; these plays, some of which, to Voltaire's horror, were in prose, were called 'dramas', and Diderot named them 'the serious genre'. Fashions change little: nowadays a manager who cannot call his production either a farce or a melodrama, announces it simply as 'a play'. This form, according to Diderot, had no rules, no general principles: it should embrace all human activities, even the marvellous and the burlesque—or, we may add, both in one, the 'grotesque' which Hugo was to preach sixty years later. Here, indeed, as M. Jusserand remarks, Diderot sounds the authentic note of romanticism. Saurin exemplified the 'serious genre' in *Beverley*, an adaptation of *The Gamester* of Edward Moore, and claimed to have enlarged the 'too hastily laid' boundaries of art. The development of this form was the 'sombre' school, established by Baculard d'Arnaud, which was afterwards to find its chief English expression in Mrs. Radcliffe's terrifying novels of mystery and horror. For this, Shakespeare was

the model; his plays supplied the highest achievement in this (as indeed in any other) dramatic method, and d'Arnaud described the scene of the ghosts in *Richard III* as an example of 'the perfect sombre', a phrase which certainly deserves immortality in a museum of curiosities. But attempts to produce 'sombre' effects of staging proved unsuccessful. Indeed, the interchange of ideas had little unifying effect on the drama of England and France, and the sporadic outbursts of enthusiasm for Shakespeare were more than balanced by the censures of the orthodox.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1764 and 1776 Cubières delivered a series of attacks on the new tendencies of the stage. He disliked particularly the increasing gloom of French drama, due to the 'sombre' school, and showing itself in the 'sepulchral farces' which had been modelled on Shakespeare. The phrase sounds to us more grotesque than it really is, owing to the changed meaning of 'farce'. Cubières displayed his views in a play called *La Manie des Dramez sombres*, the plot of which centred round a critical dispute between a 'sombre' dramatist and an upholder of classic tragedy. The former—who is represented as lacking material owing to the infrequency of sordid crimes, even in England—defends himself by arguments evidently meant ironically by Cubières, though to the Romantics of 1830 they would have been serious and sound enough: for example, did ancient kings, he asks, make love in stately Alexandrines? The didactic purpose which is never far from the surface of neo-classic criticism appears in the defence, made by the 'orthodox' hero, of princes as the sole subject of tragedy: there is nothing we can learn from clowns, from princes

<sup>1</sup> The first adaptation of Shakespeare on the French stage was Ducis's *Hamlet* in 1769; but Ducis's work belongs mainly to the transitional period following the death of Voltaire, and will be considered as a whole in that connexion.

we learn much. Finally, Cubières decided that the sombre could never appeal to the French, surrounded as they were by pleasures and amusements. This criticism, a very common one at that time, shows an extraordinary blindness to the power and scope of imagination, and must have affected adversely the appreciation of all great art. Surely even Racine was not looked on merely as an amusement, the 'idle singer of an empty day'? If so, he was in no better repute than Shakespeare. It is pleasant to record that by 1806 Cubières had produced a version of *Romeo and Juliet* 'sombre' beyond anything yet known, and declared that Juliet is 'the masterpiece of nature'.

But the main opposition both to Shakespeare and to the new forms of drama came of course from Voltaire, who from his retreat at Ferney delivered repeated onslaughts on the champions of barbarism. La Place's work had displeased him, as we have seen, for several reasons; and the new tendencies of the stage weakened the great literary domination which Voltaire exercised over all Europe. At the same time, it is ridiculous to suggest that his motives were purely or even mainly personal. There can be no doubt that he honestly believed that the admiration of Shakespeare and of other anti-classic literature actually was a reaction towards barbarism, and that he and others who decried Shakespeare and 'Les Sombreuses' were defending order and civilization.

Not even Voltaire could undertake the task of replying to all the admirers of Shakespeare. Bayle's *Dictionary* contained in its edition of 1756 a ten-page article translated from the English, which was an enthusiastic appreciation of Shakespeare—the truth of his characterization being selected here, as by Jaucourt, for special commendation—but this evoked no reply from Voltaire. But in 1760 different fortune attended two articles in the *Journal*

*Encyclopédique*, which purported, probably falsely, to be translated from the English; the editor being thus enabled to disagree. The first compared Shakespeare and Corneille; the second, Otway and Racine. The writer seems to have a creditable acquaintance with much of Shakespeare's work, though we find as usual that special selections are made from *Hamlet*. The persistent use of *Hamlet* as a typical play certainly gives countenance to Voltaire's claim of sponsorship. It is a suspicious fact that the plays he knew best—*Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*—are those most often quoted by his countrymen. The complete silence in French critics of the time about *Lear* is sufficiently explained by the absence of the play from La Place's work.

The comparison was on the whole unfavourable to Corneille. Shakespeare was undoubtedly pre-eminent in the 'terribly beautiful', for instance the ghost scenes in *Hamlet*, and the richness of his varied imagination is preferred to Corneille's 'sublime eloquence'. Corneille's plots are all on the same model, while Shakespeare's are different even when the subjects are similar—an example, which shows some study, being the different treatment of ambition in *Macbeth* and *Richard III*—but Corneille shows more skill in introducing his incidents; and, of course, Corneille has the advantage of regularity, but this perhaps merely shows his inferiority to Shakespeare, who was too great to be bounded by the rules of the stage. The conclusion is that Shakespeare 'was a great poetic genius, Corneille an excellent dramatic poet'. We must assume here that the greater is not intended to include the less. The remark about Corneille's skilful introduction of incidents points to the same conclusion—that Corneille was a master-craftsman of drama, while Shakespeare was a far greater genius, though lacking in technical greatness. This

quality in Shakespeare was the most difficult of all for Frenchmen to apprehend ; his system was so different to their own that they could not perceive its existence, and the tradition, which had now been firmly established for a century, that the essentials of drama were contained in the neo-classic code, prevented their perceiving those deeper and truer essentials which were common to both Corneille and Shakespeare, though more completely expressed by the latter.

These articles came to the notice of Voltaire, and displeased him considerably. He complained about them to Mme. du Deffand, to whom he gave a sketch of *Richard III*. The characteristic inaccuracy of Voltaire in regard to Shakespeare—the frequency of which leads us to doubt whether he had in fact ever studied Shakespeare at all closely—shows itself here in the substitution of Margaret for Anne in the wooing scene, an almost incredible error. In the following year, 1761, he published the *Appeal to all the Nations of Europe*, which was his first open attack upon Shakespeare. It was pseudonymous ; ‘Jérôme Carré’ was the nominal author, and, like the mysterious M. de La Lindelle of the preface to *Mérope*, paid high tribute to the work of M. de Voltaire, who had first made Shakespeare known in France ; though his translations, as he himself admits, are not faithful. M. Carré has a difficult point to prove here : what Voltaire had said, very justly, in the *Lettres philosophiques*, was that a literal translation could never give the spirit of the original : and he had indeed given rather a paraphrase than a translation of Hamlet’s soliloquy. M. Carré, who is righteously indignant at this conduct, now produces a word-for-word translation of the same passage. With his usual appreciation of the ‘barbarous genius’, he remarks that the soliloquy is ‘an unpolished diamond with blemishes : but if it were polished



it would lose half its weight'. The criticism rests on the false assumption that the relative values of weight and polish are the same for diamonds as for literature. This transliteration (translation it cannot be called) forms part of a sketch of the play, with occasional quotations—thus, the fearful words of Horatio—

The sheeted dead  
Did squeak and gibber in the streets of Rome,

become, in Voltaire's hands, 'the dead in their shrouds screamed and leaped about in the streets of Rome'. The whole intention of the sketch of the play is clearly hostile: and, we learn, the glory of the play (if any) is all due to Saxo Grammaticus—just as Tolstoy thought that in Shakespeare's hands the old play of *Leir* was completely spoiled.

The main argument of the article was an appeal to the impartial taste of Europe for a decision between Shakespeare and the French masters: for, said Voltaire, it was after all a question of taste. That was true enough, but it was not what Voltaire himself believed: his whole campaign against Shakespeare was based on the assumption that literary judgement was governed not by individual taste but by the unalterable laws of the classic code, and that admiration for Shakespeare connoted treachery and incipient barbarism. His appeal to the rest of Europe was ridiculous, for French literature was known everywhere, English hardly at all outside England. Indeed, Voltaire admitted this, and with extraordinary *naïveté* adopted it as an argument in his favour. Nevertheless, in order to be perfectly fair, he offered to tell Europe what Shakespeare's greatness was; to this end was included his sketch of *Hamlet*, and also several passages which La Place had, very culpably, omitted—for instance, the coarse language of Iago at

Brabantio's window: *Othello* furnished him with further material, and it is difficult without a shudder to hear Othello bidding farewell to the 'pride, pomp, and all the various circumstances of glorious war'! Finally, Voltaire included, of course, his own criticisms: so that he not only acted as counsel for the side whose defeat he desired, but summed up the case from the Bench. Shakespeare's pieces, he decided, can only please by their detached beauties; moreover, their popularity—now, as ever, Voltaire felt the difficulty of explaining this away—was mainly due in the first place to the vulgarity of his audience, and afterwards became a kind of habit with English people. Other people have agreed with the latter opinion, though its falsity is shown by the complete eclipse of his contemporaries, some of whom were almost as popular as he. Voltaire, however, destroyed his own argument (besides unconsciously exposing the whole neo-classic fallacy) by remarking that it is unnecessary to pay any attention to the rules, for evidently 'there is a way of charming a whole nation without taking all this trouble'. The tone is of course ironical: Voltaire is not here claiming the right of the artist to charm in any way he can, but merely scorning the nation that can be charmed by irregularity.

The growth of 'Anglomania' and of new feelings in literature brought with them a decrease in the popularity of the classic tragedians, and this was one of the motives that induced Voltaire to publish an edition of Corneille, with commentaries, in 1764. It is characteristic of the indomitable energy of the man that he undertook this task, which must have been an irksome drudgery, to provide a dowry for a grandniece of Corneille, and that too during his protracted and almost superhuman struggles against tyranny in the affair of Calas. His criticisms of Corneille bore a certain resemblance to those on Shakespeare, for

Corneille had frequently offended against the strict canon of the rules—for instance, he often left the stage bare during an act. Indeed in some respects Shakespeare was actually the superior of Corneille; whatever his faults, he never failed to interest, as Corneille often did—in fact, the word ‘froide’ (the ψυχρόν of Longinus) is distressingly common in these notes. Voltaire, with his usual acumen, suggests a reason for Shakespeare’s superiority in this respect. ‘Corneille’, he says, ‘lacks the grand rule, *semper ad eventum festinat*.’ This sentence is amazingly illuminating: Voltaire has forgotten for a moment the whole neo-classic code, of which the ‘grand rule’ was regularity, and goes right down to the essential of drama. And he continues: ‘I will acknowledge that of all tragic authors, Shakespeare is the one in whom are found the fewest scenes given up purely to dialogue. In each of them there is almost always something new.’ We have already noticed that, freed from the prejudice that coloured most of his critical outlook, Voltaire might have been the greatest critic of the century. The remarks just quoted are a statement—unfortunately a brief one—of one of the most vital principles of dramatic art, and this is one of those passing references that show us that Frenchmen had all unconsciously perceived the greatness of Shakespeare’s dramatic genius. Unconsciously, for Voltaire did not himself perceive the import of his words: he goes on to qualify them by saying that Shakespeare’s method of providing constant new effects is ‘indecorous’, by the use of battles, vulgar scenes, and so on. But quite clearly this qualification is not germane to the point. The characteristic of Shakespeare which Voltaire perceived (but, as usual, would not face) was that he never held up the action by a scene purely of dialogue, that is, a scene which does nothing to advance the action. The supreme play (from a purely

dramatic point of view) is that from which no scene can be abstracted without interfering with the action; in which, as Voltaire says, the action *semper ad eventum festinat*: and the genius of a great dramatist is shown in his power, not merely of introducing all the beauties of drama (poetry, passion, thought, and so on) into this plan congruously, but of actually using them to further it. *Othello* and *Oedipus* will furnish sufficient examples of this. The pre-eminence given to plot by Aristotle is still debated: but it must at least be admitted that perfect and continuous development of action is the surest way to hold the interest of an audience, which must, after all, be the first problem of a dramatist. Voltaire, in perceiving both the success of Shakespeare in this 'grand rule', and the truly dramatic means by which he attained that success, has gone far nearer to the root of the matter than any critic yet considered.

Of course Voltaire did not rank Shakespeare as equal, all things considered, to Corneille, who was at least regular in his mature works. But his censures on Corneille brought more forcibly than ever to his mind the question of Shakespeare's continued popularity. This time he explained it (or pretended to do so) by saying that mere accumulation of exciting incidents could always interest; an absurd argument, for he had just censured Corneille for the irregularity of plays which were nevertheless uninteresting, and he had often noticed that Shakespeare's English imitators produced greater irregularity with far less dramatic effect. What a pity it is that Voltaire did not apply to this problem the key which, as we have just seen, he had himself discovered!

The Commentaries contained, however, a more direct attack. Immediately after *Cinna*, Voltaire included a version of the first portion of *Julius Caesar*, and alongside

*Héraclius*, Calderon's play of the same name. Each he took to be a direct comparison, *Cinna* and *Julius Caesar* being plays of conspiracy. We have observed before how little Voltaire seems to have understood of the play of Brutus. The version was a travesty, not a translation. It was in blank verse (a form hopelessly alien to the French language), and was almost literal. This, said Voltaire, was the only way to convey a true idea of Shakespeare's words: a direct verbal contradiction of what he had said in the *Lettres philosophiques* thirty years before. Moreover, to break off in the middle of the Senate-House scene was totally unfair. Professor Lounsbury supplies a motive for this, suggesting, with more reason than kindness, that to include the Forum scene would have been to point too disastrous a comparison with Voltaire's own adaptation of it in the *Mort de César*. But the point at which to close is well chosen: it is Cassius' speech:

So often shall the knot of us be called  
The men that gave their country liberty.

Only three lines after this (III. i. 121) is the simple stage direction 'Enter a Servant', in which Moulton has found the turning-point of the play, the moment when the fortunes of Brutus and the conspirators, here at their greatest height, begin to decline before those of Antony and the spirit of Caesar. Voltaire has at any rate perceived how Antony, from the very announcement of his approach after Caesar's death, dominates the action. The number of lines is considerably reduced in translation, and there are several actual errors, some apparently intentional. For instance, he chooses to include in Caesar's speech (III. i. 48) the version censured by Jonson and, apparently, afterwards revised—

Know, Caesar doth not wrong but with just cause.

No doubt he had come across this in Theobald's note on this passage, but to include a bad line (as he and Jonson thought it) when the received text had emended it, was something very near literary trickery.

The preface which presented this distortion of Shakespeare contained little new criticism, and the first scene of *Othello* again did duty as an example of Shakespeare's indecency. The only point of interest was his attempt to consider Shakespeare and Calderon together as writers of similar 'monstrous farces'. Indeed, this similarity struck him as peculiar, and he was fain to explain it by simply saying that neither England nor Spain at that date knew any better. This, of course, was false, and Voltaire, who was acquainted with *Gorboduc*, ought to have been aware of the existence of classic tragedy in England before Shakespeare's time. The similarity of Calderon and Shakespeare seems to us simply an example of the rule that like causes produce like effects; but, as Mr. John Bailey has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> the historical method of inquiry was totally alien to the abstract rationalism of the eighteenth century, of which spirit Voltaire was the leading exponent, and this explanation could never have occurred to him. Naturalism he conceded to both Calderon and Shakespeare, but they attained it by the most base means, for it was unworthy for the ruler of the world (and a Roman, too) to say to his friends—

Good friends, go in and taste some wine with me.

But both dramatists, by that unfortunate habit of always interesting their audiences, had completely corrupted the ignorant taste of their period. Voltaire seems to be thankful that France was never cursed with a genius like Shakespeare. But it will be noticed that, as long as he regarded

<sup>1</sup> *Dr. Johnson and his Circle*, p. 173.

Shakespeare without actual passion, the problem of his power to interest—that is to say, the realization, however faint, of his supreme efficiency as a dramatist—troubled Voltaire more and more. Is it possible that had he lived his last years in the mellow peace of old age, instead of the fiercest of all his literary controversies, he would have been able to resolve this dilemma and to have seen a glimpse of the truth?

These represent the chief utterances of Voltaire up to the last great campaign of 1776-78: but during the intervening ten years he was constantly delivering attacks, on a smaller scale, against Shakespeare and his admirers, mostly in England. Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism*, published in 1764, provoked him to several replies—in the *Gazette Littéraire de l'Europe*, in *L'Homme aux Quarante Écus*, and in the *Philosophical Dictionary*. It was the first of these that contained that distorted version of a scene from *Henry IV*, in which Lord John of Lancaster became the King, and Falstaff Lord Chief Justice. Kames's work contained a eulogy of the opening scene of *Hamlet*, and this apparently first directed Voltaire's gaze in particular to the line—

Have you had quiet guard?—Not a mouse stirring.

This was to furnish him with some of his most illuminating criticisms.

The brief correspondence of Voltaire with Walpole is given an importance by a single general criticism of Voltaire's. It had arisen from some remarks in the preface to the *Castle of Otranto*, in which Walpole had compared Shakespeare and Voltaire as tragic authors, to the former's advantage; and he turned the knife in the wound by exposing a foolish error in Voltaire's commentary on Corneille's *Comte d'Essex*. This comment had, moreover,

itself been a censure on Corneille for inaccuracy. The challenge to Voltaire's competence, as a critic of English affairs, was too direct to let pass; but he naturally devoted his reply mainly to Walpole's remarks about himself and Shakespeare. Walpole had ridiculed Voltaire's claim (in the preface to *Mérope*) that the French stage was superior to all others, even the Greek: Voltaire, driven into a corner, now repeated this, and proceeded to justify it by an argument of great importance. In Athens, he said, the whole population formed the audience: in Paris, it was confined to the cultured and the refined, and the presence of ladies gave it a greater delicacy: hence Parisian taste must clearly be superior to Athenian. As Professor Lounsbury points out, Voltaire has here put his finger on the essential difference between the French and Greek stages—the one was the theatre of a class, the other that of a nation; and this is, of course, the fundamental reason for the type of tragedy developed in France, and, though imitated, not truly acclimatized elsewhere. What is remarkable, is its long reign: but this is a question of sociology rather than of criticism: France under the *ancien régime* was the nation of a class, and the national literature was the literature of a class. The marvellous system created by Richelieu and perfected by Louis XIV maintained unchanged, until its own fall, not only the whole organization of the people, but also their literature. Organic growth is possible only in freedom, which was denied to politics and to literature alike.

Of all the books that might have been, but were not, written, perhaps none—save the remainder of *Kubla Khan*—is more to be regretted than the controversy about Shakespeare into which Voltaire tried to provoke Johnson. Voltaire had smarted under Johnson's contemptuous reference to himself in the famous Preface, and in



the *Philosophical Dictionary* he justified his censures of Shakespeare by further examples of vulgarity: Cleopatra and the Clown, the wooing of Henry V, and, as usual, the first scene of *Othello*. Voltaire's knowledge of Shakespeare was becoming wider; but we cannot doubt that it was still far from complete, for he never used as examples of this kind the plays which would have best repaid his trouble—*Troilus*, *Pericles*, or *Measure for Measure*. That he was restrained by any feelings of delicacy is unlikely, inasmuch as he translated, in the scene from *Henry V*, one disgusting allusion which has eluded every other critic before or since. Johnson, who read these attacks on himself, contemplated a reply, but the indolence of his later years was too strong. That contest, had it ever been joined, would have been memorable in the annals of literary controversy.

Lesser critics, ranged like the army of Pandemonium round 'their dread commander', added their weight to Voltaire's criticisms during these years, but the expressions of hostile opinion were becoming commoner also. The once-famous essay of Mrs. Montagu—'la Shakespearienne' as she came to be called in France—appeared in 1769, and the favourable comparison of Shakespeare to the French tragic authors, a form of attack now fairly common, created much disapproval. The vogue of this book, extraordinary as it is to us, was mainly due to its so-called moderation; Mrs. Montagu did not attempt to justify Shakespeare's 'barbarity', and fully admitted his entire lack of art. This recommended the work to people who would never have read *Le Tourneur* or *Mercier*: even if she did admire Shakespeare, she did not do so from a distorted point of view. It was, characteristically, Johnson who alone refused to join the chorus of praise. Indeed, this was little deserved. Mrs. Montagu's statements about theatrical conditions

in Shakespeare's time owed little to the facts, and the judgements were often merely grotesque—for instance, while admiring Antony's speech in the Forum, she thought it much impaired by the constant repetition of the word 'honourable'. One feels that even Voltaire could have corrected this if it had suited his purpose to do so; and how it would have pleased his ironic humour to discover an actual beauty in Shakespeare unknown, apparently, even to his own nation. But, though considerably annoyed by Mrs. Montagu's work, he made no public reply. The task was undertaken by Edward Taylor, an Englishman long domiciled in France—one of those cosmopolitans satirized by Rosalind in the person of Jaques.<sup>1</sup> A worthy subaltern, he placed Voltaire above Racine, at the head of the greatest drama of the world—the French. Apart from the relative merits of the French and English stages, he seems to agree altogether with his opponent, Mrs. Montagu. Both admired Shakespeare as a poet, and both admitted his entire lack of artistry. He had, said Taylor, 'great merit as a comic writer, greater still as a poet, but little, very little, as a tragedian'. Taylor also took the opportunity to answer Johnson's condemnation, in the famous Preface, of the unities, and in doing so discovered a new argument: change of place is not impossible, but unpleasing. It seems that since Johnson had brought his robust sense to bear on this subject, the old explanation of the rule—that the scene must not be changed, simply because the rules said it should not—no longer satisfied its adherents. Taylor represents the last stage of the formalist school, who were now reduced to the attempt to rationalize those rules which in fact rested not upon reason but upon a tyrannical literary tradition. Like Iago, Taylor is merely 'motive-hunting'.

<sup>1</sup> *As you Like It*, iv. i. 35.

But the tide was setting steadily against Voltaire and the formalists. Admiration for Shakespeare was increasing noticeably. The great celebrations at Stratford in 1769 had surprised Europe: Voltaire realized that an author, whose repute in his own country was of this magnitude (even though it did not extend to foreigners), could not be dismissed merely with a contemptuous gesture. In the same year was performed the first French adaptation of Shakespeare, Ducis's *Hamlet*; an anonymous translation of *The Merchant of Venice* (a play not included in La Place's work) had appeared in the previous year; and Ducis's *Romeo and Juliet* followed in 1772. Though the spectacle of Shakespeare on the French stage was of course irksome to Voltaire, he felt bound to approve Ducis's care in keeping Shakespeare within the rules. During these years the leaders of critical opinion were coming round more and more to sympathy with the new feelings in the air, and this, undermining the dictatorship exercised up till then by Voltaire over European literature, added further fuel to his wrath. Beaumarchais, Diderot, even Marmontel at times, lent their support to the new ideas, which, culminating in a prose tragedy, drew from Voltaire that despairing cry (1772):—'The world is going to end: Antichrist has come.' But the two most important expressions of opinion were those of Baculard d'Arnaud, the founder of the 'Sombre' school, in the preface to his play *Le Comte de Cominges*, 1769; and of Sébastien Mercier, whose work *Du Théâtre: ou Nouvel Essai sur l'art dramatique* appeared in 1773.

D'Arnaud was thoroughly dissatisfied with the feebleness and effeminacy of the French stage, which he compared most unfavourably with the energy of Shakespeare. 'No tragedian', he says, 'is more akin to Aeschylus than he.' It was natural that Aeschylus should appeal particularly to

this apostle of the gigantic and terrible. He seems to have known Shakespeare well: it is a pity that his acquaintance with English drama did not also extend to the epic grandeur of Marlowe and the dark, terrible depths of Webster. *Macbeth* seems to be the play he admired most: 'we have', he says, 'no picture of the terror that follows crime, in any of our plays, that can be compared to that which we see in this tragedy'; and goes on to admire the sleep-walking scene—this is the first specific reference in France to that marvellous conception—and the appearance of Banquo's ghost, though this is even surpassed by the ghost in *Hamlet*. And here d'Arnaud makes an allusion which shows that he was truly a great dramatic critic. He remarks with admiration on the effect produced by the silent gesture of the ghost, when, before speaking a word, it insistently beckons Hamlet to follow. By this means, as he rightly insists, Shakespeare has derived from this situation the very utmost tragic effect possible. He might have added that his earlier model, Aeschylus, had known the secret of impressive silence, as we know from the reference to the silent muffled figure of Niobe mourning over her children. Indeed, it appears that the power of obtaining the highest dramatic effects without words is shared by only the very greatest dramatists. Nothing that is said in *Lear* is so poignant as that stage direction, 'Enter Lear with Cordelia dead in his arms'; nothing in any drama so terrible as the wordless knocking on the gate in *Macbeth* (a scene which at this time still awaited recognition in France). Nothing more truly shows the dramatic greatness of J. M. Synge than the simple climax of *Riders to the Sea*—the opening of the door to admit the bearers of Bartley.

D'Arnaud demands for the drama the utmost freedom in regard to both character and incident; and insists that,

as in Shakespeare, the style should be adapted to the situation. To the classicists, the style and the language were the main beauties of tragedy, as we saw even in the advanced tone of Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques*: d'Arnaud had sufficient insight to see that, however much the beauty of style may augment the power of a play, its greatness must rest on its dramatic qualities, to which everything else must be subservient—situation must be followed, not directed, by style.

The work of Mercier is more important, and deserves much greater fame than has been accorded to it. His method is the contrary of d'Arnaud's: he knew little of Shakespeare, and only used him for occasional example, his line of argument being deduced from general principles; while d'Arnaud, starting from those scenes which he admired in Shakespeare, arrived inductively at his general principles. Mercier was an ardent member of the 'sensitivity' school, and ranked 'the immortal Richardson' alongside Homer and Virgil among the greatest of the world's writers—a list that included Voltaire, but not Shakespeare. But, like Rousseau, he always had in mind a definitely moral, often actually a didactic, purpose for literature. He was, as Lotheissen says, a rebel against tradition everywhere, but always on ethical grounds. Taking up the same argument as Cubières, he rejects the principle by which kings formed the only subjects of tragedy,—'for', he says, 'what is the use of this kind of tragedy?' But the objection is to us more powerfully supported by the delightful story of the Alsatian peasant who went to the theatre in Paris, but, deciding that these ancient Greek heroes were no concern of his, soon paid no more attention. All the other formalities of the stage must disappear likewise: the domination of love, the necessity of a happy ending (at any rate for the good),

the division into five acts, and the unities. Probability—this is perhaps the nearest equivalent to that untranslatable word *vraisemblance*—must be retained, but the unities of time and place do not accomplish this; it is better achieved by truth to history and character, as in Shakespeare. His example is that scene from *Julius Caesar*, I. ii, of which Hazlitt afterwards said, 'We know hardly any passage more expressive of the genius of Shakespeare than this'. The true unity, Mercier continues, is that of interest. No problem disturbed eighteenth-century criticism, both orthodox and revolutionary, so much as this of the essential unity of drama, and (in France at any rate) it awaited the keen analysis of Guizot, who was the first to arrive at its fundamental truth. Mercier continues by not merely justifying, but demanding, the use of prose; but it appears that his distinction is between poetic prose and verse, not between prose and poetry. Synge he might have approved, but not Ibsen, nor Rostand. Aristotle, Horace, and Boileau are attacked, but Mercier is not a good enough Romantic to perceive that the elevation of the *Poetics* into an unchangeable code is a misreading of Aristotle's intention.

Perhaps the most valuable portion of his criticism is the discussion of comedy and its position in critical theory as a form entirely distinct from tragedy. To some extent he foreshadows in these remarks Stendhal's discussion of comedy fifty years later in *Racine et Shakespeare*. The object of comedy, he admits, is to produce laughter, but not merely a guffaw. What he desires to employ is the humour of the 'sensibility' school, not the wit of French comedy in the hands of Molière: for we should no longer say 'this is a piece to laugh at', or, alternatively, 'this is a piece to weep over': the two emotions being closely allied, so must the two forms, and the true form is the 'drame' which includes both, as in *Le Cid*. Superficially, this is

merely the common heresy of demanding the mixture of comic and tragic, so often blamed in Shakespeare. But Mercier in fact demands much more than this. His ideal is that tone of humour and sentiment which has always been a peculiar characteristic of English art—the tone of *Twelfth Night*, of Addison's 'Coverley' papers, and (carried to its extreme) of Richardson and his contemporaries. This kindly humour, to which true pathos can be perfectly united, is an entirely different thing from the wit of Congreve, or Sheridan, or Molière; and French taste, which has always inclined to the latter quality, does not to this day take kindly to the former. Wilde and Shaw are now played in Paris at a time when neither can draw an audience at a leading London theatre. Whether this is a condemnation of English or of French taste need not be decided; the contrast is the sole point, and the side which Mercier adopts shows that his opinions ran counter not only to the ideas of his time but to the taste of his country. They are new, as most of his book was; and more than that, they are, even to-day, nearly unique in French criticism.

Proceeding, Mercier demands that his 'drame' shall include the whole of life, and that it shall present all the details of a situation, and there shall be no insistence, as in comedy, on a single character. He qualifies this by admitting that in copying nature there must be a certain selection. Nevertheless, this whole argument—which might be adopted to-day as the creed of the realists in drama—leads him into illogicality. He had previously admitted the necessity of 'unity of interest', and this, as Guizot was to point out later, is best accomplished by the unifying effect of a single central character. It would, of course, be absurd to say that it can be obtained by no other means; but some sort of unity is necessary to every work of art, and the profusion of thorough realism is in itself antago-

nistic to it; so that Mercier is here demanding two qualities which tend to exclude each other, a dilemma which unfortunately he seems not to have perceived. Mercier had, however, the true dramatist's sense of human character. It is, he says, from minute traits imperceptible to other people that the man of genius perceives the essential points of character, and from this, as he delineates the whole, the external details spring of themselves. Mercier claims that he can read character in this way in the streets of Paris; but whether this was true or not, he has here described accurately the method of characterization which must be that of the true dramatist. Finally he demands that drama must be a national growth, as Shakespeare's was, and must make its appeal to the whole nation, for if a poem is not popular it is the fault of the poem, not the public. This is clearly far too sweeping, but it was necessary to say it in an age when 'expert' and popular taste were beginning to diverge rapidly. 'Shakespeare', he says, developing this argument, 'is more national than Corneille'; and as a result of this, and of certain faults, 'appears ridiculous in France. . . . All his heroes are men, and the alliance of naturalism with heroism adds to the interest.' It seems from Mercier's tone in this paragraph that he regards this naturalism rather as a fault than a virtue; but he adds, it is this that 'assures to Shakespeare an immortal crown'—whose realm, nevertheless, is confined to his own country. For Shakespeare's secret is to speak straight to the heart of every compatriot of his—the logical qualification, that he appeals not at all to foreigners, is left unsaid. English drama, in general, reflects the 'sad, or rather serious, national character'; moreover it is disfigured by indecency, 'but this fault, which the English are beginning to perceive, is sufficiently balanced by the accuracy of the representations, and the energy of the portrayals'. These words are more



akin to the orthodox view of Shakespeare in France than is anything else in Mercier's book. Elsewhere, in contrasting the harmony of Corneille with the rich mixture of colour employed by the Spaniards and Shakespeare, he compares English drama to a garden that resembles natural growth—words that recall, and may have been suggested by, the illustration used by Voltaire in the *Lettres philosophiques*, from the formal gardens of Marly. But his knowledge of English drama does not seem to have been exhaustive: he regards Shakespeare as a parallel to Aeschylus, a 'bold and independent' founder of a new art: and it is significant that his only quotation from Shakespeare is from the play which had formed the subject of so much of Voltaire's writings about Shakespeare—*Julius Caesar*. Moreover, the faint praise quoted above is not that of a true Shakespearean like d'Arnaud or Le Tourneur. Lotheissen's estimate of Mercier as 'an enthusiastic follower of Shakespeare' cannot be accepted. That he supported the 'Romantic' drama, of which Shakespeare is the great example, is true; but he never accepted him as the model, or even as the greatest exponent, of the form he sought to establish. Perhaps he missed in Shakespeare that directly ethical function which he demanded as an essential. Indeed, it is this ethical trend, which coloured all his theories, that most clearly distinguishes him from the Romantics of 1830, to whom 'Art for Art's sake' was already a possible formula. With this qualification, it is possible to endorse every word of Lotheissen's comment: 'Do not these words sound as if they had been spoken fifty years later, in the time of the Romantic conflict? Mercier was, in fact, . . . a forerunner of the Romantic drama. . . . So far back in time reach the beginnings of spiritual movements.' They reach, indeed, further back than this: Mercier was not the first rebel against formalism, he had been preceded by La Motte, as

La Motte by Saint-Évremond and Perrault ; but he displays a combination of sound dramatic criticism with the detailed expression of the views which were to create the revolution of 1830. He did more than destroy ; he suggested, in many directions, the reforms which did in fact replace the abuses he denounced. Mercier deserves some share, with Guizot, Stendhal, and Hugo, of the glory of 1830.

The greatest event in the history of Shakespeare in France is undoubtedly the work of Pierre Le Tourneur, who, in conjunction with two nominal collaborators, published in 1776 the first volume of the first French translation of Shakespeare. It is true that Voltaire had translated one half of one play, and passages from others ; La Place's work had called attention to Shakespeare if it had not given a real impression of him ; and in 1775 the *Journal Anglais*, in an enthusiastic biography, had first brought the Sonnets to the notice of France. But Le Tourneur's was the first attempt to present Shakespeare fairly and completely to France.

Of the translation little need be said. It was, naturally, very much superior to any previous version ; but it left a good deal to be desired. It is exceedingly difficult at any time to translate Shakespeare into French prose ; and Le Tourneur (who had already translated other English works) was almost a pioneer in this field. But perhaps his worst fault was the liberty with which he treated the text. In the scene of the drunken brawl in *Othello* he puts into Iago's mouth a song which owes nothing at all to Shakespeare : perhaps he thought, with Cassio, that 'this was a more exquisite song than the other'. The liberties he took provided one of the accusations of his adversaries, though their motives were not quite those of his more recent critics.

But it was the prefatory matter which created the

greatest sensation and opposition. Indeed, Le Tourneur, whose critical views were heretical enough in all conscience, seems to have gone out of his way to shock the orthodox; and several of his caustic comments are patently to Voltaire's address. We feel that Le Tourneur, strong in the assistance of Shakespeare's genius, purposely throws down the challenge to the detractors of Shakespeare. He opens his prefatory matter with a series of assaults on the literary rulers of France. He ridiculed the 'travesties' of Shakespeare which had alone represented him on the French stage—the reference may be to Ducis, but is more probably to Voltaire's *Mort de César* and other plagiarisms—and proceeds to overturn some ignorant arguments published by Marmontel a few years earlier. French critics at this period seldom thought a close acquaintance with their subject to be necessary: Marmontel had contrasted the horrible indecency of Shakespeare with the purity of Congreve. After this easy task, Le Tourneur drove home the argument of Shakespeare's popularity, which had always given Voltaire such anxiety, by a description of the Stratford festival; and was able to add, that though Garrick (the idol of good Shakespeareans at this time) had cut out the grave-digger scene, the play actually drew better audiences when acted complete.

But his most startling heresies lay in his critical views. Shakespeare had re-created great drama after the dark ages, and that at a time when France had no conception of it. Voltaire had frequently named Shakespeare the creator of the English theatre; but Le Tourneur, while appearing to repeat this statement (which modern criticism would hesitate to accept), gives it in fact an entirely different significance. Moreover, he proceeds to say that Shakespeare, had he lived in the time of Addison, would have been not greater but less great, for he would have been

impeded by 'rules and conventions'. And the section concluded with a wanton assault on Voltaire: Le Tourneur attacked bitterly those 'cold and pusillanimous critics' who sought to put bounds to the genius of Shakespeare.

Then followed a section which purported to be a collection of English criticisms from various pens, though it is more probable that by this subterfuge Le Tourneur, like La Place before him, disguised the most advanced of his own opinions. Nothing so directly contrary to established criticism had yet appeared. Addison's *Cato*, which had done so much good service to classical critics, was ranked below Shakespeare (as indeed in his early writings Voltaire himself had ranked it); and it was boldly said that Aristotle would have revised his rules if he had known Shakespeare's works. This was the first time this heresy had appeared in France: it struck at the roots of neo-classicism, for if Aristotle's code did not cover all possible tragedy it was no code at all. But even Le Tourneur (or the anonymous critic he quoted, if there was such an original) did not see that Aristotle's work, being an analysis of the past and not a code for the future, was complete and invaluable as it stood, though it is true enough that if he had known modern drama it would have been very different. Thirdly, convention must give way and the laws of nature be substituted for it. Here, unfortunately, Le Tourneur loses his grip on essentials. 'Nature' had been the deity even of Boileau, as it was at this moment of Rousseau and of the pastoral etiquette of the Petit Trianon, and as it was to be of Wordsworth. All meant something different by this word, and (as Coleridge showed even in the case of Wordsworth, the most sincere of the three) all rested on a false assumption in concluding that nature and art could be the same thing. Moreover, owing to its peculiar circumstances as an art-form, the drama can least of all forms

afford to dispense with convention; and, in fact, Elizabethan drama had its conventions just as neo-classical tragedy had, and as all forms of drama must have. What Le Tourneur meant, and what actually happened, was that the neo-classic conventions must give way to others. This portion of the preface is notable as containing the first critical use of the word 'Romanesque', 'Romantic'.

In conclusion Le Tourneur scornfully divided the opponents of Shakespeare into two classes—those who condemned him almost without trial for lack of refinement, and those who feared that his immense genius would thrust into oblivion the inferior poets of their own country. It was patent to all that Voltaire was to be placed in both classes, and the shaft no doubt went home to Voltaire himself.

The sensation caused by the translation, but more especially by its preface, was unparalleled. Grimm, a tolerant critic, disagreed with it; Shakespeare adapted in Paris was bound, he thought, to fail, as Racine had done in London (a prophecy which Ducis was even then disproving), and to speak of copying Shakespeare was absurd, for no one could hope to write a play on the model of his vast works. Here, perhaps, Grimm is a sounder critic than Le Tourneur, for great art never is produced by imitation. Grimm shrewdly added that the annoyance of Voltaire's followers was due to the revelations Le Tourneur had made of Voltaire's plagiarisms and of the means to which he had had recourse to escape their detection. If this was true, Voltaire evidently had a large following still: for Le Tourneur's preface roused the fiercest opposition. The greatness of Shakespeare, as here presented, stifled the customary cavils; and the fury of his critics was directed against Le Tourneur. Mme. du Deffand seems to have expressed the general opinion when she said that Shake-

speare, as translated, was beyond praise, and Le Tourneur, as he appeared in his critical preface, beneath contempt.

No such antithesis, however, disturbed the harmony of Voltaire's ideas on the subject. To him the whole book came as a shock of surprise and horror. Not the least disastrous aspect of it to him was Le Tourneur's subscription list—the number and distinction of the names showed him how widely the disease of Shakespeare had spread, and the work was dedicated to the king himself. Le Tourneur held a position at Court, where he was universally popular, and all through the conflict that followed the Court was antagonistic to Voltaire. Le Tourneur had indeed enlisted the king in support of his critical heresies: in accordance with the pose of universal brotherhood, Louis XVI was fond of visiting the very humblest of his subjects, and this Le Tourneur compared to Shakespeare's love of low life. The comparison was probably no more pleasing to Louis than it would have been to Shakespeare.

The publication of a translation would alone have been enough to enrage Voltaire, for it destroyed the last shreds of his claim to be the acknowledged sponsor and expert of Shakespeare in France, besides proving (as Grimm said) the falsity of that claim; but the prefatory matter infuriated him to the point of frenzy. Not only were the opinions such as Voltaire never brooked readily; but it discussed dramatic art without mentioning the name of its greatest living exponent (as he thought himself), and further insulted him, without actually mentioning his name, by references to the 'ridiculous travesties' of Shakespeare—a reflexion at once on his competence as a translator and on his services in introducing Shakespeare to France.

It is an ungrateful task to impute the actions of such a man as Voltaire to personal motives, but in face of the



himself to reform them; but he refused, he announced superbly, to recant what he had said about Shakespeare in order to please them. Apparently Voltaire really believed that this statement would cause consternation in England. Moreover, so great was the empire he wielded over French thought at this period, that moderate, clear-headed men like Grimm and Diderot adopted his view of the affair as an international complication, and D'Alembert, the president of the Academy, began using military language about it with almost as much excitement as Voltaire himself. Never in the history of literature has so ridiculous a spectacle been presented. And this was the view which those Englishmen took who paid any attention to it at all. Maurice Morgann regarded the attack—which, he said, could not affect Shakespeare's fame—more in sorrow than in anger; and Walpole expressed the general opinion when he said that the spectacle of a great genius like Voltaire giving way to spite—a spite caused, he thought, by 'conscious inferiority'—was painful to him. Painful it is, and its details are not all of vital importance to the study of Shakespearean criticism in France, for Voltaire in this campaign had little new to say. In his first letter after reading *Le Tourneur's* work (July 19, 1776, to D'Argental) he once more claims, but now rather in regret than pride, the sponsorship of Shakespeare: 'I was the first', he says, 'to show the French a few pearls that I had found in his enormous dunghill.' He immediately began preparing his famous letter to the Academy. It was too late, he said, to avert the disaster that had befallen France; but the purpose of this was 'to avenge France before I die'. His correspondence with D'Alembert, arranging for its publication, is occasionally interesting. Voltaire had originally suggested publication in the usual manner; his partisans in Paris succeeded in arranging a public reading



to the Academy. D'Alembert, however, refused to read the passages selected by Voltaire as proofs of Shakespeare's indecency; and requested Voltaire to find others equally indecorous but less coarse. The request did not please Voltaire, for the suggested expurgation obviously weakened his case; nor did he feel disposed to work through Shakespeare for new examples. Professor Lounsbury, indeed, suggests that he had already done this; but the facts do not bear this out: all his quotations, with the exception of one from *Lear*, are from plays he had long known well—*Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Moreover, if, as the same authority asserts, Voltaire's 'scent for garbage was keen', it is impossible that his search, if it was made, would not have been rewarded by passages from *Pericles* or *Measure for Measure*. He suggested instead that D'Alembert should stop, as if from shame, just before the coarsest lines; for, he said, the hearers' imagination would transcend even the reality. Evidently Voltaire relied, and not in vain, on the minds of the Academicians being of a nature which we do not readily associate with superior taste or exceptional refinement. But, since D'Alembert promised to publish the letter in full, the hearers were bound to discover eventually that Shakespeare's imagination was purer than their own, a conclusion fatal to Voltaire's comparison of Shakespeare's coarseness with their own refinement. Voltaire also agreed reluctantly to the suppression of Le Tourneur's name; for it was Le Tourneur whom he regarded as his chief adversary.

The letter was in two parts—the first an attack on Le Tourneur and the leaders of Anglomania; the second a discourse on dramatic art. As the only Frenchman who had produced a faithful translation of Shakespeare, he censured various faults in Le Tourneur's version, particu-

larly his habit of toning down Shakespeare's vulgarity and coarseness; and in proof of this quoted several scenes, unexpurgated except by the manly shame of D'Alembert. This first portion concluded with an appeal to the authority of Rymer: Voltaire took credit for his own impartiality in that his own criticism of Shakespeare was less destructive than that of a countryman of his own. He thus has a perfectly complete position: the honest, unprejudiced Englishman, such as Rymer, agrees with him; those who think otherwise are, of course, blinded by the national habit of Shakespeare-worship.

The second portion consisted mainly of yet another summary of *Hamlet*. The inevitable mouse, that was not heard in the opening scene, did duty once more. And here Voltaire has a criticism of importance. He asks scornfully whether such language—proper enough in a guard-room—would have been suitable for the ears of Louis XIV and his brilliant Court? These words, valueless as dramatic criticism, throw extraordinary light on the restrictions which governed French tragedy. The rigid and artificial etiquette which ruled the Court of France dominated her stage also; and between the rules fathered on Aristotle and the conventions invented by Louis XIV there was little space left for a true picture of human nature. Indeed, however he may profess to admire nature, Voltaire in these words expressly disclaims it: the language used by soldiers in tragedy must not be that which soldiers ordinarily use. Voltaire finally announces that Frenchmen are now asked to abandon Racine, Corneille, and Molière (and he might have added his own name, for the implication was patent) for a mountebank who had 'exhibited some happy sallies of wit and makes some contortions'. The accusation was quite unfounded—Le Tourneur had, of course, demanded nothing of the kind: he had merely

given Shakespeare what Voltaire had always denied him—a fair hearing in France.

The reception of the letter was enthusiastic, and, as D'Alembert told Voltaire with satisfaction, 'the English who were there went away displeased'. Among these was Mrs. Montagu; and one small boy, La Harpe reports, was with difficulty prevented from hissing Voltaire's blasphemies. D'Alembert and Voltaire immediately began to use the language of generals who have staked all on a desperate chance and won—an absurd pose in view of Voltaire's position in the literary world of France; though Professor Lounsbury goes too far when he says that few people in France had any knowledge of or interest in Shakespeare, for Le Tourneur's subscription list, apart from any other evidence, proves the contrary.

The victory, however, was far from decisive. Voltaire had once more offended the authorities, for his warlike metaphors imputed to the followers of Le Tourneur—chief of whom was the king himself—a lack either of loyalty or of taste: the publication of the letter was prohibited, and the Academy was punished by the Government for its reading. Next, D'Alembert, directly the first flush of victory was past, was bound to admit that even the meeting of the Academy had not been perfectly unanimous. The cult of Shakespeare did exist in Paris. The news robbed Voltaire of his last shreds of self-control. Despair descended on him: 'I die disagreeably,' he wrote, 'I have seen literature die in France.' But he roused himself to one last effort. Childish as his excitement was, we cannot withhold our admiration from the magnificent vigour with which the old warrior, now in his eighty-third year, flung himself into the conflict. That marvellous energy which, single-handed, had beaten down the opposition of tyranny and bigotry in the affair of Calas, had not

flickered out yet. Sadly enough, it was now directed into unworthy channels; he sought to have Le Tourneur's work suppressed, but, as was natural in view of Le Tourneur's position at Court and his own unpopularity there, his efforts to enlist in the matter the interest first of the Duke of Richelieu and then of the royal ladies were fruitless. The duke seems to have been the only Frenchman who perceived the ludicrous side of Voltaire's campaign: he was a young man of frivolous ideas.

Meanwhile Voltaire's correspondence followed up his main attack. He decided that Le Tourneur's opinion was insincere—for no 'man who is not an absolute fool' could honestly prefer Shakespeare to Racine—and that he had been tempted by avarice. And for the last time he faced that terrible problem of Shakespeare's popularity in England, though 'he has not written two decent lines'. This remark shows how far Voltaire's rage had carried him. He would never have said this forty, or even three, years before. And this time, forgetting what he had said in the *Commentaries on Corneille*, he assigned this popularity to the acting of Garrick, who had 'created an illusion whose atmosphere enveloped the playwright', and who 'represented naturally what Shakespeare had disfigured with ridiculous exaggeration'. The illusion he refers to is, no doubt, the illusion of greatness, not 'illusion' in the theatrical sense; but the second sentence makes the second interpretation possible. But this latter criticism is exactly the opposite of what Voltaire really means. His remarks, in the letter to the Academy, about the mouse which the sentinels of Elsinore did not hear, show that nature was the last thing he wanted: what he means is, Garrick has represented decorously what Shakespeare wrote naturally. But the whole argument is patently childish: Shakespeare had held the stage (in adaptations hardly more bold than

Taylor, to rationalize the rules of Aristotle. The tendency only appeared in the middle of the century; partly because until then the rules had not been seriously questioned—Johnson's preface being the first great stand against classicism—and partly because it was only the reform of the stage in 1759 which, as Collé remarked, allowed any real theatrical illusion.<sup>1</sup> Before that time the rules had been accepted unthinkingly: Voltaire in 1734 had said that they 'were deduced from reason', but he did not say how.

It was into this turmoil that in February 1778, Voltaire—now eighty-four years of age—unexpectedly threw himself. Never had his popularity and influence been so high. His reception was that of a conqueror. Crowds followed him in the streets, and unprecedented tributes were paid to him at his public appearances. Only the Church and the Court held aloof. In March appeared his last tragedy, *Irène*, amidst great enthusiasm, and with it its preface, Voltaire's last critical utterance. This was a reply to Mrs. Montagu's famous essay. It contained nothing new in the way of criticism; and was indeed rather a defence of French tragedy, especially Racine, than an attack on Shakespeare. As he was here replying to a lady, Voltaire's tone was much milder than before; his powers too were failing, and his matchless irony was losing its sting; moreover he felt himself near his end, and a spirit of toleration descended upon him. He regretted having made an international affair out of a literary dispute. To the last he held firmly to his claim of honest independent criticism: 'I have done justice to Shakespeare and Calderon. I have never paid heed to national prejudice.' Who would brand with hypocrisy the dying words of a man like Voltaire, a man so passionately sincere in all his great struggles for

<sup>1</sup> See above, page 19.

liberty? We may feel that he did not read his own motives aright; but let us be thankful that he was able to die in the opinion—however mistaken—that he had fought well for what he believed to be the right.

The death of Voltaire on May 30, 1778, practically marks the end of the great conflict; but the tumult of attack and reply lingered on for a short time. Through it Le Tourneur continued his task, and with each new volume his subscription list grew. La Harpe considered that this annoying fact merely proved the badness of French taste; like Voltaire, he was confronted by the difficulty of having to explain away an almost universal opinion. His explanation was childish enough, but the only alternative was to admit Shakespeare's merit. Le Tourneur made no reply to the invective that had been heaped upon him, save for one scornful reference to the bizarre war waged by a great poet, the panegyrist of Shakespeare when unknown, his enemy when translated. He made no effort to disguise his contempt for the tumult that had been raised. He had expected, he said, that a translation of a great English poet would have been taken by France as a distinction, not an outrage. The prefaces to the later volumes, mainly by Eschenburg, the German translator of Shakespeare, said all that Le Tourneur could have wished to say; but he carefully refrained from stating his agreement. Indeed Le Tourneur's moderation and coolness throughout the affair contrast very favourably with the actions of his opponents.

Besides the abuse hurled at him by Voltaire, Le Tourneur had suffered an unmerited snub as a translator from Baretti, who had said that no one could properly understand Shakespeare without being familiar with the language and constantly hearing his pieces actually played. La Harpe considered this ridiculous, seeing that it meant

(as is very largely true) that no one could criticize Shakespeare except an Englishman. He unluckily forgot that Baretti was repeating a criticism from Voltaire himself, in the *Lettres philosophiques*. Voltaire and Baretti are probably right in thinking it unfair to judge a play except in representation: La Harpe and, it should be added, Aristotle, think otherwise. But Baretti's criticism cannot be accepted as it stands, for it disallows to practically all Frenchmen—including Le Tourneur, presumably—the right of any opinion about Shakespeare: the only exception, curiously enough, being Voltaire himself, who had studied the English stage carefully during his stay in England; and Voltaire had destroyed his own argument by claiming that his travesties told Frenchmen all they needed to know about Shakespeare.

The translation was soon 'in everybody's hands', said Ducis, and Le Tourneur himself said that practically every one admitted Shakespeare's great merit. Many favourable reviews appeared: the *Année Littéraire* published articles, one on each play, justifying Shakespeare's method in the tone of the *Lettres philosophiques*: 'The works of genius are like those of nature, which never show the cold regularity of the productions of art': and though the refusal of England to submit to the rules is regrettable, it is because they are 'tyrannical rules to which a republican spirit cannot submit'. Absurdly as this is put—and false as it was shown to be by the dominance of neo-classic ideas in French tragedy during and after the Revolution—it is sound enough in its apparent appreciation of the fact that the organic growth of English literature was due to its intensely national character, which again had its origin in the vitality and freedom of social conditions in England at all times. The most powerful influence on Shakespeare's side was the translation of

Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, which appeared in 1785; and Sébastien Mercier had published in 1778 a new attack on the whole neo-classic system. In part, this was a reply to Voltaire: Mercier asked why it was unpatriotic to admire Shakespeare, while Pope, Milton, and Addison were praised—though it may be doubted if Milton had any great reputation among the admirers of formalism; Johnson had censured his scansion without appealing 'from criticism to nature', as in Shakespeare's case. Mercier again demands, with the true dramatist's interest in 'quidquid agunt homines', that the drama shall portray 'the thousand different characters around us, with their striking features'; and, of course, calls for the abolition of all the rules and conventions of classic tragedy.

But equally vigorous were the replies of the formalists. Palissot and Clément in the *Journal Français* asked whether England or France had succeeded best in 'bending its natural taste to that of antiquity, upon which every literary nation has formed its own'? The formalists were falling back more and more on the classics: Voltaire in his heyday had placed Racine, as the supreme model, above Euripides. But, though Le Tourneur's translation was widely read, public opinion was swinging back to formalism. Grimm observed that Voltaire's strictures were being generally accepted, while Shakespeare and his translator were consigned to barbarism and the madhouse. This is merely an individual opinion, but the trend of events shows that Voltaire's vigorous attack, coupled with the decline of Anglomania, due in part to the political situation, had swept away that pose and restored France to her previous contentment with classicism. Voltaire did no more than hasten the end of Anglomania; but, after its complete collapse, he emerged with higher prestige, and during the revolutionary period his criticism exercised a stronger



influence even than in his lifetime. La Harpe remained the dictator of taste, and as late as 1799 was able to remark weightily that, had Shakespeare known the rules like Corneille, or imitated the Greeks like Racine, he would have written better pieces, though he might not have been the equal of them, 'for that depends on the degree of genius'. Genius, in La Harpe's eyes, has some importance; but he would not have admitted that genius could exist except within the circumference of the rules. Outside France Voltaire's influence was enormous: Sherlock, travelling on the Continent in 1778-79, found his views repeated everywhere, even to his phraseology. Frederick the Great told him his (or rather Voltaire's) opinion of Shakespeare: an artist must follow the rules, if such exist, of his art; 'Aristotle', he continued—but at this name Sherlock felt that he had heard all he wanted to hear, and reported no more. Frederick was an ardent Voltairean, but his genius did not extend to thinking out critical questions. He produced an essay on German literature in 1780, which attacked the Romantics in Germany (who produced 'detestable imitations' of Shakespeare, such as *Goetz von Berlichingen*), and then Shakespeare himself: 'I call them monstrous farces because they sin against all the rules of the theatre.' It was untrue: he called them monstrous farces because Voltaire had done so. Without the unity of time, he thinks, there is no likeness to reality: a remark which displays his complete lack of thought on the subject.

In France, and even in Germany, Voltaire's powerful opposition undoubtedly retarded knowledge and appreciation of Shakespeare. At the time of his death his influence was enormous, and it still colours Italian criticism of Shakespeare and English of Dante. It was his disapproval that had suppressed the attempted Romantic revival in the middle

of the century, and his final campaign threw France back into the state of mind that preceded that attempt.

Admirers of Voltaire would wish to forget his actions in regard to Shakespeare. His criticism was vitiated all his life by lack both of knowledge and of sympathy, and in his last years by national prejudice and, it must be admitted, to some extent by personal vanity. He frequently resorted to means utterly unworthy of any reputable critic in his efforts to combat the increasing popularity of Shakespeare. And, finally, he who was the chosen invincible champion of liberty in all else, denied it fiercely to the one sphere only that always needs it most—that of art.

At the same time it must be observed that the accusations of inconsistency so often made against his Shakespearean criticism are unjust. His opinion, that Shakespeare was a great poet but a contemptible dramatist, remained unchanged all his life; only in his youth he stressed the first quality, in his old age the second. And he never denied Shakespeare's poetic greatness save once in his last campaign, when anger distorted his judgement; just as he never perceived his dramatic greatness, except unconsciously, in the Commentaries on Corneille.

The greatest men have faults, and it is not surprising to find stains on the memory of the greatest literary man of the eighteenth century. Nothing that he said or did about Shakespeare can outweigh his immense services to the cause of liberty and toleration; and we have seen more than once that, even through the neo-classic prejudices which blinded him, he was able to see more clearly to the fundamental truth of dramatic art than many of his Romantic and revolutionary opponents. Shakespeare has conquered him at last; but he was an adversary worthy even of Shakespeare's steel.

### III

## FROM THE DEATH OF VOLTAIRE TO THE FRENCH ROMANTIC REVIVAL (1778-1821)

DURING the second period of the knowledge of Shakespeare in France—the half-century between the death of Voltaire and the outburst of Romantic ideas—the situation is quieter and the criticisms of Shakespeare less important. Neo-classicism still holds the field; La Harpe and Geoffroy bear bravely on the banner that Voltaire let fall; liberty, triumphant in affairs, is still denied to tragedy. But, though the asperity of his critics was little less than before, Shakespeare made great strides among the reading public. In each successive volume of Le Tourneur's translation (the second appeared in 1779, the third in 1782) the subscription list grew. Indeed, for those who accepted the orthodox view of Shakespeare as a formless, artless genius, there was no reason to withhold admiration except from his dramatic prowess. An admittedly great poet, he could be read with pleasure; though his entire lack of dramatic art made it impossible to perform his plays or even to read them as plays.

Nevertheless, continued efforts were made to adapt him to the requirements of French tragedy; and though he was not responsible for the first such adaptation, it is Ducis who has to his credit the earliest sustained attempt to popularize Shakespeare on the French stage. Shakespeare, however, had to pass through many distorting

mirrors before he was fit for presentation. An operatic version of *The Tempest*, staged by Rochou de Chavannes in 1768, was adapted from Dryden's adaptation. Chastellux's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* went beyond Garrick's, for it omitted the comic passages—'and the tragic', as M. Jusserand quaintly adds, though he unfortunately fails to indicate what was left! No one liked it, for the play was neither English nor French, and so failed to please the admirers of either literature: without the catastrophe the whole action seemed to lack drift, and Mme. Riccoboni, contemplating the situation, found herself wondering what had happened or was going to happen. *Othello* was also attempted by Douin in 1773 and Butini in 1785, but neither obtained great success. By restoring the unities and expurgating the low comedy of the play Douin considered that he had made the play 'as regular as any of the Greek or French tragedies'. This does not seem to have come to the ears of Voltaire, who was then still alive, for he could hardly have borne it in silence. In fact, Douin's words are not justifiable by the strict neo-classic code, for the vulgarity of Iago and Emilia, and the absence of such essentials as the *liaison des scènes*, were enough to render the play barbarous. The horrors were refined—though to the modern reader the alteration by which Desdemona was stabbed instead of smothered seems little improvement in that direction. Butini's version had the same tendency, and included the whitening of Othello's skin. But these remedies were far too mild, as indicated by La Harpe's characteristic comment on a version of *Richard III* which was produced by De Rozoi in 1782, 'to the great scandal of all decent people', says La Harpe, 'who were revolted that so flat and barbarous a farce should be tolerated'.

It was some time before this that Ducis's series of adaptations began: *Hamlet*, his first task, being produced

in 1769, and *Romeo and Juliet* in 1772. By one of the greatest of all Fate's ironies, it was Ducis who occupied the seat in the Academy vacated by the death of Voltaire. Ducis bore a certain resemblance in character to the author he adored and travestied. Mild and tranquil, he was universally popular, and had not an enemy in the world, not even among the men who most detested his writings. His sincerity was such as frequently to make him ridiculous; and he prepared to adapt Shakespeare without knowing a word of English. His *Hamlet*, based on La Place's work, was, according to M. Jusserand, 'a hybrid drama, Greek and Danish, French and English, all at once', while Lotheissen calls it 'an absolute parody'. It was, however, regular; the unities are observed, confidants abound and discharge their duties with an almost cynical realization of their dramatic purpose; the ghost remains discreetly in the *coulisse* as much as possible, and Hamlet and Ophelia (who is the daughter of Claudius) overcome their enemies and live happily ever after. The French preoccupation with the love interest is exemplified by the transformation of Ophelia: Ducis thought Hamlet's dilemma would be more poignant if his enemy was the father of his beloved, for he did not perceive that this consideration went for less than nothing with Shakespeare's Hamlet. Indeed Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia's father, alive or dead, is a thing we find it hard to forgive. The play, however, was a great success, though Collé and Diderot, on behalf of orthodoxy, expressed their disapproval.

*Romeo and Juliet* followed in 1772, and by acknowledging a debt to another author Ducis scored another success. Of this play Lotheissen says: 'The mixture Ducis has here produced is incredible.' To Shakespeare's story is added that of Ugolino from Dante's *Inferno*, the part being sustained by old Montague, whose hunger Romeo alone

survived. The scene in which Montague related this story was frantically applauded, and even Collé called it 'une belle scène'. Ducis also succeeded in dragging into this scene Macduff's words, 'He has no children!' The rest (which Collé disliked) is even less like the original. Romeo, a prophetic follower of Rousseau, believes in the brotherhood of all men, and so cannot hate even the Capulets. It is not clear whether this sentiment (which also produced great enthusiasm) was shared by the Capulets; if so, we can understand why it was necessary to 'give more energy to the enmity of the Montagues and Capulets', which, according to the *Année Littéraire* in 1778, Ducis adroitly accomplished by the Ugolino episode. Energy is the very last quality lacking to Shakespeare's play; but Ducis had of course expurgated the catastrophe. Even so, it was complained that Ducis's method of piling up horrors produced the ridiculous rather than the sublime; genius, his critics assured him, needed only one word, but the question was to find the right one. Not even Ducis seems to have observed that the best guide in this difficult problem was Shakespeare himself. But horror of any kind was dangerous on the stage of pre-revolutionary France, the 'gentle and submissive people' who offered so great a contrast to the fickle and turbulent English. Why, asked Ducis's critics, did he present such crimes in a nation 'where our petty manners are so far from the energy these crimes demand'? 'A gentle and polished nation', said Marmontel severely, '... should present only characters softened by good manners and vices palliated by *bienséances*.' One feels that the Revolution came none too soon; that without it France would have faded away into a gentle—and perfectly refined—euthanasia. *Romeo and Juliet*, however, had to contend with further difficulties: the Marquis de Brancas objected to seeing a play about families of whom

he had never heard, and who were related to no one he knew. We can only hope that his acquaintance was widened in later life—perhaps to include the adapter of the *Merry Wives*, the afterwards notorious Collot d'Herbois.

Ducis, however, was impervious to criticism, and to frequent entreaties to write a 'tender' play after the model of *Zaire*. His *Lear* (1783) was more daring even than its predecessors. The unity of place disappeared; the scenery was 'sombre' and horrifying; *Lear* was presented mad. Its success was great, Brizard as *Lear* being much applauded. The last Act, however, was not so effective as the others; and this leads one to suppose that Ducis had in the earlier Acts managed to catch much of the tone of Shakespeare, upon which the happy ending dear to the heart of the eighteenth century must have jarred (Edgar, who is the son of Kent, marries Cordelia). The success of this audacious production was a blow to the orthodox: La Harpe, like Voltaire twenty years before, felt some reason must be found for it. Perhaps he feared that if he found no alternative, the truth—that *Lear*, even in Ducis's hands, was superb drama—might occur to some one. His explanation was that the theatre, which had once been the resort only of men of well-trained taste, had now been invaded by the rabble, who had been taught to enjoy a pleasure not intended for them. The Revolution was indeed necessary: but, as an explanation of the success of *Lear*, La Harpe's words have a touch of truth; Shakespeare and Racine wrote for different audiences, and while Shakespeare's appeal is to all men, Racine's is probably more limited. The tragedy of Racine is, as La Harpe says, not meant for the rabble; that of Shakespeare is for all, and the social changes of the period inevitably produced a change in the appreciation of both.

Ducis's series of adaptations continued, embracing

*Macbeth*, *King John*, and *Othello*. Mme. Vestris, who had made a great success in *Lear*, eclipsed it as Lady Macbeth, and is said to have equalled even Mrs. Siddons, to whose acting of this character numerous critics, both French and English, have borne eloquent witness. In order to preserve the unity of time, Ducis was forced to contain Macbeth's whole history—from the rising general to the embittered and fallen tyrant—within the space of twenty-four hours! Talma's performance as Othello, in which he adopted the silent method of acting made famous by Garrick, was also much applauded. In this, his last play, produced in 1792, Ducis to some extent receded from the audacity of *Lear* and *Macbeth*. The action never leaves Venice; there are confidants in profusion; every one uses the stately periphrases essential in French tragedy. Ducis did all he could, by whitewashing Othello's face and Iago's character, to make the play palatable; but all in vain, for when Othello stabbed Desdemona (or Hédelmone, as Ducis calls her) the whole audience rose in horror and several women fainted. Ducis was forced to alter the denouement; the plot is discovered just in time, and all ends happily, even for Pézare (Iago). There can have been little of Shakespeare left in Ducis's play, for surely after the terrible scene of Othello's questioning of Desdemona (iv. ii) no one can expect, or even desire, a conventionally happy ending. At this time, however, the weakly manners of France had still to be considered: within a few months they were to be washed away in blood.

The other Shakespearean adapters of the time followed the same principle. The iconoclastic Mercier produced in 1782 a version of *Romeo and Juliet*; though written in prose, it is couched throughout in the stately periphrastic language of neo-classicism; it has the usual confidants and narratives, and a happy ending. It is possible, without



defending this, to find it less horrible than Ducis's *Othello*, for the tone of *Romeo and Juliet* lacks the sense of impending doom which hangs over all the great tragedies. But Mercier went further than necessary in his search for happiness. Not only do Romeo and Juliet survive, but a universal reconciliation takes place and (as M. Jusserand delightfully says) 'the curtain falls to the sound of kisses'. Marie-Joseph Chénier, a critic of the old school whose views will be considered below, produced about 1791 *Brutus and Cassius, or the last of the Romans*, entirely in verse, and with only one scene, Brutus' tent. Shakespeare unaltered had no place on the French stage. For tragedy, he must be regulated; but his plays provided a good basis for other arts, such as opera, to which no rules applied. *Romeo and Juliet*, *Cymbeline*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and even *Hamlet*, were so used as excuses for music and tremendous stage effects of the 'sombre' or Romantic kind.

Such was the sole purpose of Shakespeare on the French stage. And this is the excuse for Ducis, were any needed. A faithful adaptation had no chance of production. La Harpe, in adapting the *London Merchant*, had been fain to soften the character of Millwood. Of Ducis's admiration for Shakespeare there can be no doubt; and till his death in 1816 he was continually engaged in revising his adaptations, which held the stage even after his death, falling only before the onslaught of the Romantics. His discrimination perhaps did not equal his admiration. After recasting an Act of *Hamlet*, he writes that he has tried to season it with 'grace, pity, and especially terror'. There is enough terror in *Hamlet* for the taste of most of us; but Ducis, it appears, was at heart a follower of Mrs. Radcliffe, of the school of sombreness and horror—which perhaps explains why it was *Lear* and *Macbeth*, the two most horrifying dramas of Shakespeare, that he chose for his most daring innovations.

In spite of the opposition with which most of his works were received, Ducis was paid high tributes by most of the critics of the time. La Harpe remarked that it was fortunate that Ducis knew little of human nature, for had it been otherwise he would have surpassed every one. Chénier declared that Ducis was one of the greatest men of genius that France had produced. None knew so well as he the secrets of terror and pity. No one, however, equalled in adulation Ducis's own friend Thomas, who called him the 'missionary of the theatre'. The chorus, however, was not unanimous: Geoffroy, in the *Journal des Débats*, delivered vigorous attacks upon Ducis and Shakespeare simultaneously. He knew little of Shakespeare, too little even to perceive the abuse of his material by Ducis. Shakespeare might have been good enough, he observed, for the rabble of London long before: the people of Paris could not be expected to like him. Moreover, he added with a rapid transference of his attack, the only faults Shakespeare lacked, Ducis had supplied—frigidity, triviality, and lack of interest. A further article, opening with a volley of typically Voltairean criticisms of the barbarities of Shakespeare, proceeds to condemn Ducis's *Lear* root and branch—Geoffroy's disgust being excited almost equally by the 'horrifying' scenery, the bombastic language, and the absurdity of the action. 'There are, certainly, a few pearls', he says elsewhere, adapting Voltaire's famous phrase, 'hidden in the dunghill of Shakespeare; but Ducis has not been so fortunate as to find them.' This criticism, however much we deplore it, is at any rate one of the shrewdest double blows ever delivered in literary controversy.

However much praise might be lavished on Ducis, there was little change in the appreciation of Shakespeare. Chénier produced a 'patriotic tragedy' entitled *Charles IX, or the School of Kings: an austere and tragic picture of*

*political crimes*, with which he hoped to reform tragedy. We cannot feel sorry, if this was to serve as the model for the new art, that his hope was illusory. This play broke away from tradition in all directions; but Chénier followed it up, as we have seen, with the strictly orthodox *Brutus and Cassius*, and seized the opportunity for some thoroughly Voltairean remarks on the 'ignorance and barbarity' of *Julius Caesar*. The following words can merely be quoted —no comments can do them justice: 'Is it possible to hear without disgust Brutus reproach Cassius with feeling an itching in his hand? Such words as these are still more revolting: "I had rather be a dog, and bay the moon, than such a Roman."' Truly we have made little progress since 1738, when the Abbé Le Blanc observed that Brutus and Cassius abuse each other so 'that you cannot take them for Romans'! *Julius Caesar* stuck firmly in the throats of the French. This conception of the solemn and stately Roman died hard: we shall meet it again, for it survived even the earlier Romantic critics.

The two most important critics of this intermediate period are Mme. de Staël and Chateaubriand.

The work of Mme. de Staël entitled *De la Littérature* is, in a sense, Romantic; it has for its main object the support of 'Northern' literature against its neo-classic enemies. Mme. de Staël was a great admirer of Ossian; but she was not a good enough Romantic to justify, as Victor Hugo did, Shakespeare's 'Gothic' methods of appeal. Nevertheless she found much to admire in Shakespeare, though, as we shall see, there was nearly always a fly in the ointment. The standpoint of Mme. de Staël in this book was not essentially different from Voltaire's; probably both, if they could have spoken with entire sincerity, would have revealed the same conception of Shakespeare's achievement; but whereas Voltaire, owing to the scars always visible on

his national and personal vanity, desired, if it were possible, only to mention his faults, Mme. de Staël, on the other hand, preferred to ignore his faults and dwell upon his beauties, since these consorted better with the trend of her main argument. Hence her criticism, though fundamentally it shows little advance on that of Voltaire, is in appearance much less destructive.

She follows him in hailing Shakespeare as the founder of English drama: 'Shakespeare commences a new literature . . . it is he who has given its impulse to English literature, and its character to English dramatic art.' The mistake is a natural one, and indeed the final clause is to a certain extent accurate: in any case, literary history is not a strong point with Mme. de Staël, who seems to have very vague ideas of the chronological order of Shakespeare, the Civil War, and the group of poets headed by Cowley and Waller.

In the two great essentials of tragedy—pity and terror—she admits Shakespeare's mastery; in particular he has succeeded in exciting pity without the accompaniment of admiration, sometimes even for a character actually contemptible; a feat which requires the utmost genius, but which, if accomplished, produces an effect not to be surpassed. The criticism is acute and, I think, original; strangely enough, the examples which support it are not those which seem most obvious, such as Desdemona, Richard II, or (in a wider sense) Macbeth. The argument, however, carries her away: she proceeds to find the reason in the English character, which, unaccustomed to subservience, finds it difficult and unpleasing to contemplate persons who must be admired. Without mentioning names, she has told us how little she has felt of Othello, Antony, Coriolanus. Can it be true, as she claims, that in Shakespeare, though the situation is great, the hero differs from other men less than

the hero of a French tragedy? Yes, in one sense it is true: Shakespeare's heroes, lofty and awful figures as they are, are yet men, with human traits and human weaknesses; the sublime heroes of France are impossible abstractions of royalty, in whom any touch of human-kindness would be *lèse-majesté*. Which is the finer tribute—this on Othello:

This did I fear, but thought he had no weapon:  
For he was great of heart.

or this on Corneille's Oedipus, after the terrible revelation?

La surprenante horreur de cet accablement  
Ne coûte à sa grande âme aucun égarement.

Shakespeare's power of raising terror in his audience she fully appreciates. She observes, not without surprise, that the emotions aroused by the peril of death—as in Henry VI, Richard II, and Lear—are in Shakespeare's hands sufficient to grip the whole attention. The line of thought is the same as that which has just been considered: most dramatists rely on the past glory of the sufferer—

... Into what pit thou seest  
From what height fallen, ...

to Shakespeare, death alone is enough for tragedy. For the terror of evil as depicted by Shakespeare she has further praise. 'Crime is in Shakespeare', she finely says, 'like death in the Bible, the King of Terrors.' But the counter-blow follows immediately. Macbeth, great as it is, would be greater if the effect had been produced without the use of the supernatural. She does not indicate how this could be accomplished; which is unfortunate, for her ideal *Macbeth* would be a parallel to the proverbial play of *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. The fault of the Witches is that they are not 'mythological personages'—

this is nearly thirty years after Douin was advised to make Othello speak in 'the general terms of the gods of mythology'—but merely the figments of a nightmare. Mme. de Staël does perceive, however, that the words of the Witches do but echo the passions already half formed in Macbeth's heart. In *Richard III*, Shakespeare has sounded the depths of crime without the use of supernatural aids: but here we meet another of his faults—his terrors are apt to fall into horror and disgust. This criticism is due to nationality rather than to period. Even to-day the terror excited by the action of the stage alone, apart from words, finds greater scope in English than in French taste. The French mind is too much occupied with the evidence of the eyes. Mme. de Staël finds it impossible to approve, on the stage, the scene of Arthur's pleading with Hubert, the character of Caliban, the deformity of Richard; the present fact blinds her to the imaginative effect of the scene: she can think of nothing else but the red-hot irons, the monstrosity of Caliban's appearance, while a hunchback is to her, not painful, but simply comic. Mme. de Staël fails to see that what she is criticizing is not the excess of horror in presentation, but the failure of the dramatist to lift his audience to such a pitch that they can accept anything; though, perhaps, the failure may be with the audience, not the dramatist. Voltaire knew better when he remarked, in the preface to *Oedipus*, that any violation of decorum was possible if the language was sufficiently lofty to carry it off. When the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles was produced in this country in 1912, it was once said that the realistic imitation of the bleeding eye-sockets of the blinded Oedipus produced an intolerable feeling of horror: in fact, so overpowering was the total effect of the tragedy at this stage, that without a conscious effort of attention the physical aspect of blindness entirely escaped notice.

It is fair to add that Mme. de Staël's objection to horror is due not so much to 'weakly manners' as to a dramatic principle—that it is destructive to illusion, since physical suffering cannot be adequately expressed by any actor. This is obviously a matter of taste, based on personal experience. Most people could recall actors who in such situations have produced the true illusion with perfectly tragic effect: but it cannot be denied that scenes of pain and violent death do make greater demands upon the illusion than any others. When the clashing of swords around Caesar is actually heard, that due mean between belief and disbelief in the actuality of the scene, which constitutes dramatic illusion, is harder to maintain than at any other point in the play. At the same time, the argument already used applies equally to this second objection; since dramatic illusion is based upon dramatic interest, the stronger the interest the more strain will the illusion be able to bear.

Mme. de Staël's praises are nearly exhausted. She comments with admiration upon the presentation of love in *Othello*—though we note that she does not use Iago as an example of Shakespeare's power of sounding the depths of villainy—and upon that superb situation which only Shakespeare has been able to portray, a noble mind wrecked by sorrow and deserted by all: Hamlet, Ophelia, Lear. How much more poignant is Ophelia without the retinue which would have to follow her on the French stage! Will it not be possible, she asks in conclusion, to represent in this new France heroes who may be men, with the weaknesses of men?

Shakespeare's faults are many, though it must be admitted that we do not find all we expect to find in Mme. de Staël's criticisms. Most of them we know by heart already. Nationality is enough to explain her

disparaging comment on the historical plays, written merely to please the taste of the insular English. No one, even in England, is disposed to place these plays on a level with the great tragedies; but we cannot help feeling of all French critics, even down to the idolatrous Hugo, that their normal good sense deserts them when dealing with these works. This may be national prejudice too: there is no means of deciding. Shakespeare, says Mme. de Staël, is superior even to the Greeks in power of passion and in knowledge of men: but he is far inferior to them in art, as shown by his prolixity, his useless repetitions, his incoherent images. Again, the intervals between his sublime passages are filled in not with simplicity (which would become them best) but with affectation—that affectation derived from Italy which is (to her) so great a blemish on *Romeo and Juliet*. Yet, in spite of this, Shakespeare has been able in this play to imprint ‘his Northern genius on this picture of love’. Mme. de Staël’s praise is sometimes more damaging than her censure. The prevailing characteristic of *Romeo and Juliet* seems to us to be precisely the fiery passions native to the hot South. It is the drama of the sultry noon, as *Lear* is that of the grey Northern dawn, and *Macbeth* of the thunderous midnight. The criticisms just quoted from Mme. de Staël are such as are familiar in the eighteenth century. We can but hope that she does not agree with Mrs. Montagu in finding in Antony’s use of the word ‘honourable’ an instance of ‘needless repetition’. But since she cites no example of any of these faults, we cannot tell.

But Shakespeare’s main faults, as we might expect, are those of taste. His women, though they often speak nobly, equally often speak in the worst of taste. It would be interesting to discover whether Mme. de Staël meant by



this such characters as Juliet's nurse, or such lines as Portia's—

Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife,

which would be equally shocking to French ears. She does not tell us. Moreover, Shakespeare constantly spoils his plays by obvious appeals to vulgar popularity—a trait which shows that the barbarous origins of English drama were not completely shaken off—such as stories and proverbs. Lord Chesterfield once remarked that no gentleman quotes a proverb, and Mme. de Staël, who evidently agrees, is not enough of a Revolutionary to perceive that Shakespeare's greatness is shown in the universality of his appeal, which is not only to fine gentlemen. Even Rousseau and the Terror have failed to kill the spirit of Louis XIV, as the spirit of Caesar survived the dagger of Brutus. Finally Shakespeare's use of contrast, the throwing of tragedy into relief by the use of comedy, is, of course, condemned: and this is understandable. In general terms, the method of the Middle Ages and of the North has been contrast; that of the Classics and the South, harmony. Medieval stained glass windows are built up of conflicting primary colours: the art of the ancients consisted not in balance, but in unity. The two methods are fundamentally different, and no critic accustomed mainly to the one (as Mme. de Staël probably was) can be expected to appreciate the other. This method of contrast, she thinks, shows merely that Shakespeare was deficient not only in art but in good taste—a more serious fault. Such are his blemishes, which his followers would avoid; but, though they may detract from his honour among foreigners, it is yet true that his genius places him far out of the reach of lesser men.

Mme. de Staël's criticism is not strikingly original, and

is really notable more for its omissions than its contents. She has censured Shakespeare for his breaches of decorum, though without calling the code of Boileau to her aid; but except for one brief unsupported statement she makes no reference to his prowess in dramatic art; and her complete silence on the question of the unities is very noteworthy. Probably she agreed with Voltaire on this point, but was unwilling, in view of her whole argument, to relegate so typical a 'Northern' genius as Shakespeare to complete oblivion.

No such reluctance is exhibited by her contemporary, Châteaubriand, whose essay on *Shakspere ou Shakspeare* appeared in 1801. Châteaubriand was one of the advance guards of the Romantic army, as Voltaire of the Revolutionary, and the two were alike in this, that they entirely excepted the drama from the scope of their reforming ideas. Châteaubriand, however, had been considerably influenced by the school of sensibility headed by Rousseau and Richardson; and he also exhibits a form peculiar to himself of the eighteenth-century doctrine of the moral value of art.

Châteaubriand opens his essay with a brief review of his French predecessors in Shakespearean criticism, and proceeds to a general attack on English critics. His comments verge on abuse throughout, but he reserves his most powerful indictment for Johnson's famous answer to Voltaire: 'These are the petty cavils of petty minds: a poet overlooks the casual distinction of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with the figure, neglects the drapery.' Moderate as he seems to us, Johnson was of course to the neo-classics almost the arch-heretic; and this remark Châteaubriand cannot let pass. He observes acidly that, far from being mere drapery, the true representation of manners is the very basis of tragedy; and follows this

up vigorously by comparing the critics who only rely on 'nature' with politicians who in order to abolish social distinctions would plunge us into barbarism. Clearly there is no arguing with such a point of view—save by a reference to two of the apostles of his faith: Boileau, who said 'Let Nature be your only study', and Aristotle, who said that drama is not history.

Châteaubriand observes the confusion into which his predecessors have fallen owing to the necessity of praising the genius and condemning the faults of Shakespeare almost in consecutive sentences: and decides accordingly to consider him under three heads, distinguishing the period in which he lived, his poetic genius, and his dramatic art. The third promises to be the most interesting; and so it is. But Châteaubriand's work is valuable in that it does separate and classify these three tendencies of Shakespearean criticism in France, which had been confused by Voltaire and still awaited disentangling.

Considered in relation to his period, Shakespeare, says Châteaubriand, cannot be sufficiently admired. Lope de Vega is the only contemporary dramatist who can be compared with him, but Shakespeare was superior even to Lope. After considering what knowledge existed in Shakespeare's time and country of the drama of the ancients, he concludes that Shakespeare was uneducated and illiterate. No doubt he is right as far as Shakespeare's classical knowledge is concerned; but it is certain that Shakespeare was a keen and voluminous reader, besides enjoying a wonderful power of storing for future use the impressions he derived from books, as from life.

Under the heading of natural genius, Shakespeare is no less wonderful. Châteaubriand has nothing but admiration for his insight into human nature and into all the circumstances of human life. But, he is careful to add, such

beauties must not be considered under the heading of dramatic art; for, if they were, the question would then be whether they are necessary to the subject, well motivated, and forming part of the whole effect—so far his qualification is thoroughly sound,—but these scenes require one more ornament—they must keep the unities. Without this addition, the principle, especially as applied to Shakespeare, would have great interest, and if worked out fairly might give us that first dawn we have awaited so long—the realization of Shakespeare's unique dramatic power. As it is, we must still wait.

Châteaubriand's examples of *belles scènes* from Shakespeare are finely chosen, though, as was to be expected, they are not scenes in which the action is at a critical point, like the knocking on the gate in *Macbeth* or the temptation scene in *Othello*. His first is the conversation of Macduff, Malcolm, and Ross, the bringer of bad news, in England: with this he makes an interesting comparison to a scene from *Les Horaces* of Corneille, 'but', he adds, 'the phrase of Shakespeare, "He has no children!" remains without parallel'. Now that this phrase has been—almost too carefully—analysed by Professor Bradley, it would be interesting to know in which of the three possible senses it was understood by Châteaubriand. Perhaps he did perceive that this phrase is great not as poetry but as drama—for the sudden light it sheds upon the feelings of all the persons concerned. A little more, and Châteaubriand would have been an interpreter and not a censor.

He also quotes the parting of Romeo and Juliet after their marriage night, adding that this is one of the additions Shakespeare has made to his material. This scene leads him naturally to the question of contrast, and he seems, in opposition to Mme. de Staël, to justify this, as being a characteristic of actual life, and also a method used by the

Greeks. Such contrasts, he observes, should not be rejected altogether, but the danger is that a single expression may wreck the effect by reducing it to the ludicrous. This brings us back to the argument cited with reference to Mme. de Staël, that anything is possible if the pitch has been sufficiently raised. The point that is worth noting is that Châteaubriand here justifies as effective in practice a trait in Shakespeare which was anathema to the orthodox—the mixture of comic and tragic. No doubt he thought this safe enough when considering Shakespeare as poet, not as dramatist; but the argument is nevertheless one of those accidental *exposés* which we have already noted among neo-classic critics.

Châteaubriand barely mentions the comedies, merely remarking that English comedy is of the kind that, starting from ridicule, ends by approaching pathos, as in Sterne and Fielding, while the French method is directly opposite. It is the difference, an Englishman would say, between true humour and mere wit: true humour—the kindly laugh that carries not malice but affection—is, we cannot help believing, a distinctively English quality not fully enjoyed by any other nation. We have observed the distinction in Mercier, and shall encounter it, more fully considered, again. Châteaubriand has the usual French censure for Shakespeare's affected style. This is, of course, a question of taste: we cannot deny the presence of Elizabethan conceits in Shakespeare—probably we have no desire to do so—and so there is no arguing with this criticism. It is indeed an inevitable one to a French critic, whose trend must, by the whole course of national taste, be towards the simplicity of the classics. Matthew Arnold, in the third of his lectures *On Translating Homer*, has drawn the contrast between the thought of Homer and of Shakespeare, showing how the thought of Homer is always plain and direct, while that of Shakespeare,

even when expressed with the utmost possible simplicity, is frequently a difficult or curious thought; and that he and his contemporaries, with their use of conceits, do often become absolutely fanciful. Arnold is here only urging the unsuitability of this style for a translator of Homer: but he is, of all English critics, the most French in tone and ideas; and this passage is interesting for the light it throws on the appreciation of Shakespeare by a critic who is more akin to classical ideas than most Englishmen. No French critic can be expected to like this quality of Shakespeare; but, since it is all a matter of taste, Châteaubriand has no more right to censure Shakespeare than we to censure him.

So much for the first two sections; and in passing to the third, Shakespeare's dramatic art, Châteaubriand assumes the black cap. Eulogy is past, he says: criticism is at hand. The distinction is deplorable, and unfortunately is not even so near its end as are most of the views we have been considering; we find it even in Hugo.

Châteaubriand opens with a vigorous attack on Johnson's heretical preface—which, he says, goes to prove that there are no dramatic rules, that art is not art. The passage he quotes from Johnson does not bear this out, but Johnson's admirers will admit that the generalization (in the sense Châteaubriand intended it to bear) is what Johnson meant. Shakespeare's method, then, is to throw together in confusion all the incidents of life; a notebook and an open eye are all that one requires to produce a Shakespearean play; this disorder (though it might lack the genius of Shakespeare as a poet) would exactly represent his power as a dramatist. 'I shall not consider', he continues airily, 'whether it is true that Shakespeare has imparted more movement to the stage, and carried terror to a greater height, than in French tragedy; . . . I shall not consider whether, in his pieces, everything moves rapidly towards the catastrophe' (that is,

whether *la grande règle* of Voltaire is observed!) 'or whether the intrigue is skilfully complicated and resolved, by continually suspending and accelerating the spectator's interest.' The magnificent *naïveté* of this confession is almost staggering. The enumeration of the points which are not of importance is in itself a sound piece of criticism; it almost suggests that Châteaubriand has perceived what are the true foundations of drama, for he has named several of them. He adds that, if French tragedy does indeed lack movement, then it were well if more movement was introduced; but that does not mean that it should follow Shakespeare.

Châteaubriand is shrewd enough to see that the slightest chink in the neo-classic armour will be fatal. The rules, he says (contradicting the Voltaire of 1734), are not arbitrary; they are born of nature itself, and art has merely separated what nature has confused. The whole passage is vague, but the reference seems to be to the rules of decorum, not the unities, and in particular to the mingling of comic and tragic: but the concluding sentence is true enough, and naturally applies to the art of Shakespeare, who (for instance) has selected from the events and emotions of Hamlet's life those which bear upon the subject. Every dramatist finds that he knows far more about his characters than he needs, or can introduce, in his play. What is not true is Châteaubriand's statement that Shakespeare includes everything: thus, we are not shown a scene highly dramatic in itself, though perfectly superfluous, the arrival of Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern in England. Thus it is often with these rules. They are sound in principle and vicious mainly in their application. Montesquieu remarks with deep wisdom, 'When I visit a strange country, I do not ask whether the laws are good, but whether they are well enforced: for every country has the most admirable laws'.

As for Shakespeare's power of pathos, Châteaubriand admits that he can make his audience weep, but this is not true art.<sup>1</sup> The 'true tears', he says, 'are those which flow at the bidding of beautiful poetry; there must be more admiration than sorrow'. The contradiction between this and Mme. de Staël's criticism is very striking. This trait of Shakespeare—the tremendous effect attained by pity unaccompanied by admiration—which Mme. de Staël selected for especial praise, Châteaubriand rules out altogether, though his arguments for doing so are not clear. When I see the blinded Oedipus, says Châteaubriand, my eyes are enchanted by a superbly beautiful spectacle'; moreover, I know all the time that it is only a play, so my tears flow to the accompaniment of pleasure. He is groping here after the theory of illusion; but his conclusion seems to be that the action, the situation, do not affect him at all (indeed, if he is conscious all the time that it is only a play, they cannot do so): that the action is merely a setting for poetry, which alone produces pathos. The argument is repeated from Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques*, and in dealing with it there we perceived its fundamental error. Aristotle rightly ranked Diction and Thought below Character and Plot; it is the function of poetry in drama to increase the effect of situation, not, as Châteaubriand would hold, the reverse. His example from *Oedipus* seems to weaken rather than support his argument; and when he adds that the ancients, in accordance with the principle he has just stated, gave a beautiful appearance even to the Furies, he is surely incorrect, inasmuch as there is a story that at the first appearance of the *Eumenides* children died of fright and women miscarried.<sup>2</sup> In any case, there is no

<sup>1</sup> Compare Goethe's remark: 'Touch the heart! any bungler can touch the heart.'

<sup>2</sup> The authenticity of this scholiast's remark is disputed, but Pollux also



beautiful poetry in the *ᾠμοὶ* and *μυγμοὶ* of that terrible awakening scene.

The faults and the popularity of Shakespeare provide a text for a sermon on the degeneracy of letters and morals, which always go hand in hand. Sententiousness is a bad sign: 'it is always in corrupt periods that there is most discussion of morality'. 'Bad taste and vice nearly always go together', he says elsewhere; and so admiration of Shakespeare must be repressed, for 'with the English it is only ignorance; with us it is depravity'! One must always be on one's guard against foreign influence, and remember when in doubt that there is always one certain and unchanging model—the literature of the ancients. Considering that Voltaire definitely ranked French tragedy as superior to Greek, and that Châteaubriand himself, in this very essay, had cited from the *Phædra* and *Alceste* examples of the mixture of tone detested by neo-classicism, this is a bold statement: but Châteaubriand is hard pressed, and proceeds to throw a sop to the Romantics by suggesting that a golden mean might be struck between the possibly over-artificial art of Louis XIV and the licence of Shakespeare. 'I realize', he says, 'that there will be danger in all this, and that if we give way a little it will be difficult to stop the process.' He was right. Literature was going the way of politics: concessions had been withheld so long that they were useless now, and there was nothing for it save revolution. His concluding remark is worth quoting, as an opinion characteristic not of the time but of the author: 'Every effort to attain this great revolution will be useless as long as we remain irreligious. Imagination and sentiment are essentially bound up with religion: and a literature whence delight and tenderness are banished can

has a reference to some such story. See C. R. Haines, *Prometheus Vincit*, p. x.

only be dry, cold, and mediocre.' It is pleasant to be able to part with praise from a great man whose views we have attacked; and this prophecy of Châteaubriand's, where for the first time he goes to the root of the matter, may yet be true. Drama has arisen from religion always, and precisely for the reason stated: it may be that we must await another revival from the same source. Here, and here alone, Châteaubriand, the rearguard of the army of neo-classic critics of Shakespeare, is a hundred years before his time, for he anticipates the dictum of Tolstoy in 1907: 'The drama which has no religious element as its foundation is not only not an important and good thing, as it is now supposed to be, but the most trivial and despicable of things.'

Châteaubriand's criticism, as a whole, is of the conventional eighteenth-century type, but we have observed in him a really keen appreciation for isolated beauties; and if he is unable to perceive any art or system in the form of Shakespearean drama, this is because it has never occurred to him to look for any system save that of Racine; for, as we have seen, not even the defenders of Shakespeare—Mercier, Mrs. Montagu, Le Tourneur—had suggested that his dramatic art was as great as his poetic. Châteaubriand is far from being so bitter an adversary of Shakespeare, or so staunch an upholder of orthodoxy, as was Voltaire.

For the moment, indeed, orthodoxy seemed safe enough. Fievée, in 1802, can still speak of the 'delicate' French; Palissot, in the following year, remarks that the admirers of Shakespeare wish to plunge France back into barbarism. As an antidote, mention must be made of Sir Sidney Lee's discovery, the small volume entitled *Pensées de Shakespeare*, which he attributes to Charles Nodier. This consists of a series of reflections collected from Shakespeare and translated, prefaced by a brief but vigorous eulogy.

The extracts are some of the thoughts of Shakespeare which may be useful to the conduct of life, for 'Shakespeare', he says, 'is a friend whom Heaven has given to the unhappy of every age and every country . . . I . . . am content to cast a flower on his grave, since I am not able to raise a monument to his memory.' This note of 'personal devotion', as Sir Sidney Lee calls it, is new in France, and is perhaps the first authentic note of the French Romantics' view of Shakespeare. Nodier adds, that his book gives no knowledge of Shakespeare: for 'from Shakespeare's works one can draw forth a philosophy, but from no system of philosophy could ~~one~~ construct one page of Shakespeare'. That is a finely chosen tribute to the universality and humanity of Shakespeare.

But such expressions are isolated. During the first decade of the nineteenth century the *ancien régime*, on the stage and in dramatic criticism, still held sway. Napoleon did not look kindly upon innovators in such a field, where sedition could find a veiled expression; and the influence of Voltaire was still great. It is impossible to accept Sir Sidney Lee's statement that Voltaire's 'efforts to depreciate Shakespeare were very partially successful. Few writers of power were ready to second the soured critic, and after his death the cult of Shakespeare in France, of which he was the unwilling inaugurator, spread far and wide.' It would be truer to say that few writers of any kind were ready to oppose Voltaire; and to speak of a 'Shakespeare cult' at the time of Châteaubriand's essay is ludicrous: Le Tourneur's translation (the only one in existence) was not reissued till 1821, when the Romantic fever was already in the air.

Indeed in many ways these years, 1800-15, are, from our point of view, reactionary. Tragedy was cast still in the accepted mould. No successor of Ducis appeared;

the influence of Shakespeare on the French stage could be nowhere perceived save faintly in the plays of Nepomucene Lemercier. His attempts to found a new and national French drama were half-hearted, and, besides continual opposition from the censorship, his plays met with little public success. His subjects were drawn from French history, and he shows a frequent debt to Shakespeare: indeed, his method is clearly suggested by Shakespeare's historical cycle. Besides his writings for the stage, Lemercier represents the advanced school in criticism; and his criticism, though less daring than his plays, is heretical when compared with the ideas ruling at the time. His advocacy of reform is tentative, and he seeks always to make it acceptable to the orthodox by some qualification not really relevant. Thus, desiring to justify the mixture of tones employed by Shakespeare, he invents a form called the 'drame héroïque', and takes Corneille's *Don Sanche* as an example of it. This form, 'less elevated than tragedy', is allied to the lyrical, and can mingle all feelings. It is not improbable that Lemercier derived this theory from the similar line of argument which, in England after the Restoration, created the 'heroic play'. Again, he admits the principle of the unities; but they may be violated if the effect gains thereby, as in *Julius Caesar*—but, he adds, in spite of all Shakespeare's beauties, 'the licence in which his genius indulges, can only result in imperfection of form'. In a dialogue between an 'advanced' critic and a classicist Lemercier places his strongest general views, showing how in *Macbeth* the abandonment of the unity of time is essential to the effect of the subject. This criticism is original; not even the dramatic innovators had yet perceived any advantage in abolishing the unities, except to remove at once absurdity and artificiality from the stage; Lemercier was the first to

understand the positive value of lapse of time. The style of Shakespeare he praises highly; he always adapted the style to the situation, which is, he says later, 'of all the mysteries of art, the most difficult to penetrate, and it is this that makes the great tragic writer'. Voltaire had said that tragedy depended upon its language for immortality; but this is not the same as Lemercier's meaning. As has been observed already, tragedy depends frequently on the power of the writer to lift the passion to a pitch equal to the situation; in this sense, Lemercier is right, but style and passion are not quite the same thing.

Lemercier is, in sum, a reformer of drama, but we have seen how very chary he was of controverting the neo-classic code. But he certainly did know something of Shakespeare, and he admired his work strongly. He even goes so far as to say that in spite of the barbarous confusion of his plays, Shakespeare, alone of English dramatists, 'has preserved, by his sublime grandeur, the characteristic dignity of the tragic form'. The criticism is a good one, and Lemercier is the first to see that true dignity is indicated not by an artificial pomposity, but by the revelation of a noble and naturally dignified character. Had he given himself a free hand, he might have been a valuable and daring critic. As it is his writings show a fine appreciation and considerable thought. In relation to his contemporaries he must be looked on as a reformer, half-hearted as his efforts were: and had he been luckier in environment, his criticism might well have had a permanent value.

During these ten years reaction in drama was at its height. Criticism was dominated by Geoffroy and his colleagues on the *Journal des Débats*. Geoffroy represents the extreme wing of the formalists, who, like the Spartans at Thermopylae, were to die where they fell—

indeed to charge at the last even beyond the position they had held so long. So uncompromising is Geoffroy, that some of his heaviest censures are directed at Voltaire's feeble struggles against the restrictions of the stage. His action in dedicating *Zaïre* to an Englishman is stigmatized as unpatriotic—this to the protagonist of the great war against English barbarism! Nothing can excuse Voltaire's imitation of Shakespeare, rather than Racine or Sophocles, in *Semiramis*—Geoffroy no doubt did not know Shakespeare well enough to perceive the plagiarisms in *Eriphyle*, *Mahomet*, and *Zaïre*. Mercier and Beaumarchais are the targets of further abuse, and of Diderot, as an author, it is hard to say whether he was 'a charlatan or a madman'.

Shakespeare himself naturally does not escape: Geoffroy examines *Hamlet*, and concludes the whole question by deciding that '*Hamlet* is an entirely barbarous composition, in which one can find no trace of the ideas or manner of Sophocles'. Sophocles is his grand model: any play that is unlike those of Sophocles is thereby condemned. *Lear*, in Ducis's hands, rouses Geoffroy to greater ire even than *Hamlet*; of *Othello* he says, '*Zaïre* is a triumph of regularity and wisdom in comparison to *Othello*'. Perhaps it is as well that Voltaire did not live to read these words: to be compared with Shakespeare in barbarity would have tried his temper high.

It is unnecessary to examine Geoffroy's criticism in further detail. He and his followers—for he was not alone—had nothing new to say, except in so far as their reaction against reforming ideas was more violent, and carried them farther back in the history of criticism, than that of the formalists of Voltaire's time. Essentially the positions of Voltaire and of Geoffroy were the same; the neo-classic system depended ultimately upon two or three definite rules—especially the unities—which Voltaire

accepted as implicitly as Geoffroy; and no real reform was possible till these were abolished. Puerile as his criticism is, Geoffroy extorts a reluctant tribute of admiration for the vigour of his attack. Like Byron in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, he has little to say, but he says it with a force that compels attention.

But he was fighting in a lost cause. There was nothing fresh to say within the limits of the classic form; and tragedy, bound by popular taste and the dominating critical ideas into that form, was becoming completely devitalized. Only the superb acting of Talma kept it alive long enough to receive its *coup de grâce* from the Romantics. And the influences on the other side became daily stronger. Shakespeare was so sore a subject that he could exercise little direct influence: the inspiration came from the new school of drama in Germany, to whom Shakespeare was the idol and the model. Schiller had been adapted on the French stage as early as 1792, and Kotzebue followed in 1799; and further versions of plays by both authors appeared during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Kotzebue did not conquer the French stage as he did the English; but the energy of the new German drama contrasted with the feebleness of their own could not fail to strike French minds. The conflict which was now proceeding in French taste is exemplified by Benjamin Constant's translation of *Wallenstein* (he abbreviated the name to *Wallstein*) in 1809. In his hands the play is reduced to conformity with the rules. He was not a whole-hearted classicist—he disliked the long declamations of French tragedy—but his objections are always cautious. Thus he admits that the unities make the dramatist's task more difficult, and that they militate against truth of character and incident: he states in fact the chief objections to the unities—but he adds, 'in spite of the trouble they cause

and the faults they produce, they are, I think, a wise law'. Why? He gives no argument in their favour, indeed there are none from the standpoint he takes, which is a fundamental one: evidently (though he does not say it) his only argument is Frederick the Great's 'Aristotle—'.

On one point Benjamin Constant shows himself advanced: it is in a discussion of character. French tragedy displays only one event, one passion; English and German, a whole life, a whole character. The latter can thereby treat an almost unlimited range of situations and characters, which in French tragedy are always stereotyped. Especially is this so of character. Polyphonte (in *Mérope*), he justly observes, is exactly like every other tyrant in French tragedy; Richard III is like no one else. 'Polyphonte is a type, Richard III an individual.' This is precisely true, and, though we have met tributes to Shakespeare's power of characterization before, this distinction has not been made before in so many words. As we observed in considering de Jaucourt's criticism in the *Encyclopaedia*, the typical character was not only countenanced, but to a certain extent demanded by the classic code: and Johnson, contradicting Benjamin Constant, had actually put it to Shakespeare's credit that 'in the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species'. So that Benjamin Constant's praise of this quality is, in essence, heretical. He was not so bold, however, as to carry his precept into practice, and Thecla, in his hands, became a conventional tragic heroine. His conclusion is, that 'French tragedy is, to me, more perfect than that of any foreign nation'; but there are virtues in the latter, and it is a useful thing for Frenchmen to know them. It is La Place's argument over again; but Benjamin Constant is much less daring than La Place was, as we have seen, and his views are



never in opposition to the rules, except unconsciously. His work is more important for its addition to the growing influence of Schiller than for its original contribution to the situation.

This was in 1809; in the following year Mme. de Staël completed her work entitled *De l'Allemagne*, which, however, owing to the action of the censorship, was not published in France till four years later. During the ten years since the publication of *De la Littérature*, her ideas had enlarged themselves: this work is the first shot of the Romantic attack on the established order, as Voltaire's letter to the Academy was of the reaction against Shakespeare which we have just considered. Each of these was the first open utterance of a tendency dating years back; and belonging therefore to the period which precedes it, each is the first event of that which follows it. Hence it is these two works that have been chosen to mark the terms of our first two periods.

Mme. de Staël's work was the strongest blow yet delivered at the classic system: not because it was more unorthodox than, for example, Le Tourneur's *Preface*, or Mercier's *Nouvel Essai*, but because it was backed by a more reasoned argument, and a wider range of examples; and also because her reputation as a critic of literature and affairs recommended her opinion to people who would not have given to a notorious innovator a fair hearing. The chapter entitled 'De l'Art dramatique' is a sustained attack on the whole system of French tragedy. The unities must be rejected, save that of action; and if the truth of the events is marred by the unities of time and place, they must disappear: to keep them is 'to sacrifice the basis of art to its form'. This is well said. Of course, the champions of the old school would have replied that the basis of dramatic art consisted in the three unities; but Mme. de

been controverted, for no appeal to reason had yet been made in dramatic theory. Without herself deciding, Mme. de Staël here throws open the question to be decided fairly from fundamental premises.

She proceeds to illustrate her remarks by the example of Shakespeare. Her admiration for him had grown in the last ten years; but not so far as to include a full appreciation of his dramatic art. He knew more, she thinks, of the human heart than of the theatre. We cannot accept this, for Shakespeare's pre-eminence is so astounding in both spheres that it is impossible to make a distinction. The defect of his art lies exactly in the quality she admires—his philosophic depth: his ideas, she thinks, hold up the action. But surely the peculiar greatness of Shakespeare's thought is its dramatic quality: the wisdom of Ulysses goading Achilles on to battle, wonderful as it is, makes a greater appeal because of the effect which we see it produce upon Achilles, parallel all the time to the effect on our selves. Dramatic poetry is truly dramatic when the appeal of the poetry comes to us reflected from a human character. Even to Mme. de Staël, Shakespeare's dramatic art is the last of his qualities which can be apprehended. But she is the first to observe Shakespeare's extraordinary impartiality to his own characters—his 'universal objectivity' as it has been ponderously called—which often seems to be an 'almost Machiavellian irony'; she here, with exceptional insight, anticipates Professor Dowden's doctrine of Shakespeare's insistence on fact, for her reference evidently is to the pitiless clearness with which he lays bare the weaknesses of a character like Prince Hal.

It is interesting to observe that, in contrast to her previous utterance on the same subject, Mme. de Staël now approves the contrast of tone used frequently by Shakespeare and occasionally by the Germans. She proceeds to

turn against himself Voltaire's argument about the delicacy of the Parisian audience. 'In England all classes are equally attracted by Shakespeare's plays; but our finest tragedies do not interest the people; . . . art is divided into two, and the bad plays contain touching situations badly expressed, while the fine plays portray admirably situations which, because they must be dignified, are often frigid.' Very little has been heard of the 'bad plays' mentioned; if her statement is correct, it is an interesting proof of the fact that if natural growth is suppressed in any field it will make its appearance in an adjacent one—just as a century earlier originality, denied an outlet in tragedy, had found it in opera. Unfortunately Mme. de Staël does not push home this argument, that the tragedy of the old school is the tragedy of a class and is thereby doomed to decay.

In conclusion, she asserts that progress, the condition of constant change, is essential to tragedy as to everything else.

The rules are only the path of genius: they tell us merely that Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire have passed that way; but if the goal is reached, why quibble about the route? True: but what is the goal? What is the essential aim of tragedy? She does not tell us; the formalists would have met the argument by stating simply that the aim of tragedy was that result which is attained by keeping to the rules. Her ideal of tragedy is a fusion of the styles of Racine and Shakespeare; and, in spite of Lacroix's disagreement with this suggestion, this is more or less the form that French tragedy took in the hands of Hugo and his followers—the demands of the extremists, like Stendhal and Mercier, for the use of prose, being found incompatible with the taste even of the Romantics in France.

Mme. de Staël's work is one of great value. Her attack on the neo-classic system is well considered, and founded, for the most part, on the soundest premises. Her appre-

ciation of Shakespeare's depth of thought and knowledge of human nature is notable; and though she has no true conception of his dramatic art, she is in this not behind many of her Romantic successors. At the time she wrote, her defence of Shakespeare's mixture of tones was daring in the extreme; and the praises she bestows on the qualities she most admired in him will always be worth quoting.

The book, 'a landmark on the road of progress' as Lacroix calls it, had great influence, forming, so to speak, a basis for the growing influence of Romantic writers in other countries. Two years after its publication there appeared a small book by Alexandre Soumet, entitled *Les Scrupules littéraires de Mme. de Staël*, which in effect took up her ideas and carried them a stage further. The traces of neo-classicism which clung to her theories were swept away, and direct imitation of foreign theatres, especially the German, was boldly demanded. Yet even here we can see a trace of Voltairean ideas. Why does he select the German drama? Even the Germans do not rank Schiller alongside Shakespeare. It is because Shakespeare is still a *casus belli* in France.

Yet Shakespeare was to play a leading part in the great struggle for dramatic freedom. Mme. de Staël's work was the first to lay down the definite distinction of Classic and Romantic (though the word Romantic owes its origin in France to L<sup>e</sup> Tourneur), and she had boldly said that

Romantic literature alone can be brought to perfection, because, having its roots in our own soil, it alone can grow and obtain new life'. Wilhelm Schlegel's lectures on dramatic literature, delivered in Vienna in 1809, had been published in France, and he himself was received enthusiastically in Paris in 1814. His comparison of French tragedy with Shakespeare undoubtedly exercised great influence on the side of the reformers, as did the work

of his brother Frederic on the Ancient and Modern Literatures.

The impulse had been given : the downfall of Napoleon opened the way for the expression of ideas which he had repressed ; from the year 1814 we may say the Romantic revolution began. The course of that revolution, especially as directed by, and relating to, appreciation of Shakespeare, must be the subject of our next section.

## IV

### THE ROMANTIC PERIOD (1821-1870)

THE publication in 1827 of Victor Hugo's play *Cromwell*, and its Preface, the declaration of Hugo's creed, is generally taken to be the climax of the Romantic conflict; others have found in Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* the utterance that turned the tide. The revolution of course affected the French view of Shakespeare, and it is this, rather than the course of general dramatic theory, that mainly concerns this inquiry. From this standpoint it seems to me that the most important work of these years is the Preface of Guizot to the complete translation of Shakespeare, published by him in 1821 in conjunction with de Barante and Amédée Pichot. This is the great opening of the true criticism of Shakespeare in France: but the prelude, opened by Mme. de Staël, has yet to be considered.

The sudden fame of Byron and Walter Scott, to which France and Germany subscribed at a time when they hardly knew the names, apparently, of Wordsworth and Coleridge, was a powerful influence on the side of the Romantics. That Byron used the Shakespearean form of drama, in spite of his admiration for Pope, told against the old school; who, nevertheless, led by Geoffroy and his colleagues on the *Journal des Débats*, still presented an uncompromising opposition to the reformers. But their imminent fall was foreshadowed in an interesting work quoted by Lacroix — *Passé et Présent*, by Charles de Remusat.

This book, inspired by the plays of the Comte de Gain-

Montaignac, who adopted the form of drama used by the English and the Germans, is naturally on the side of the new order. 'It has become impossible', says de Remusat, 'to take any interest any longer in works which rest only on a conventional ideal; and all the possible effects of the magnificent, vague language of tragedy in verse, of its frigid splendour, of its epic narratives, have already been employed in France.'

Lacroix's estimate of de Remusat's importance seems to be exaggerated. His criticism of the existing model of tragedy is vigorous, and he drives home the essential point that the whole system has outlived its usefulness and its appeal. He perceives clearly enough that reform is on the way—'the revolution is at hand', he says ('l'insurrection approche'), but he has no clear idea of its methods. He prophesies the revolution to be accomplished by other men, but does nothing, on the constructive side at least, to accomplish it himself. Indeed his suggestions for the future are vague and self-contradictory. He refuses to approve 'the extreme liberty of the stages of foreign countries, that contempt of all probability (*vraisemblance*) which injures the clearness and the effect of the action of the stage, as well as the development and clearness of the sentiments'. These words make it clear that de Remusat was no admirer of Shakespeare; and also that he has not thoroughly considered the question of 'probability' or illusion. What he does want, he proceeds, is the 'intelligent liberty' which can obtain the effects that are the true essentials of drama: these he enumerates admirably; but, since he has already said that the means used by the greatest dramatists for the effects are inadmissible, and since he fails to offer anything in their stead, his criticism, interesting as it is, can have no real effect on the situation, except destructively.

During these years the attempts at reform on the stage were becoming more frequent; adaptations of Schiller maintained their popularity, and—without complete abandonment of the rules—the noblemen of Greece and Rome began to give way, as heroes of tragedy, to persons of modern European history and story. Young authors made their début as ardent devotees of the rules, and, when encouraged by success, emancipated themselves as far as their audiences would allow them from the strict canon. Lemercier remained the chief exponent of the new forms; but while his subjects showed his desire for the foundation of a national drama on the model of Shakespeare's historical cycle, his treatment was mainly classical in form, and the restrictions he imposed upon himself went far to render his work valueless and his influence negligible.

The event of these years in the history of Shakespeare in France is the publication in 1821 by Guizot, de Barante, and Amedée Pichot of a complete edition of Shakespeare's works. To this was attached the essay by Guizot afterwards republished alone under the title of *Shakespeare and his Times*. The translation, which was a complete revision of Le Tourneur's somewhat defective version, would alone have made this an event of great importance; the prefatory essay gives to the whole the pre-eminence just claimed for it. Guizot's essay is not only the first French criticism of Shakespeare which is based on sympathetic knowledge and fundamental argument, but it is perhaps the only French work until recent times of which no student of Shakespeare can afford to be ignorant.

Guizot perceived clearly enough the decisive effect which his weighty pronouncement must necessarily wield on the struggle between classicism and romanticism: consequently the problem he proposes to solve is not whether Shakespeare is a great writer—this is admitted—



but whether his system is superior to Voltaire's, and to do this he considers it necessary to examine the nature of dramatic poetry, especially in England. The tacit assumption, that dramatic poetry can vary in different countries, is a step forward: the neo-classics declared that there could be only one form of it, which was known and fixed. And Guizot opens his argument by laying down the necessity of drama to be popular, since by its medium its appeal is, more than that of any other art, to men in the mass. This is the reason, he adds, that drama has arisen always from piety, the most universal of emotions. The argument has already been noticed in dealing with Châteaubriand: Guizot, of course, did not share Châteaubriand's religious ideas, and so did not add the corollary that drama could not exist without piety.

In the section that follows Guizot makes a very fine analysis of the rise of English drama and of the causes which determined its form. Two characteristics of English life differentiate it from that of France: the personal freedom and independence enjoyed by the nation even under the Tudor despotism, and the close union of all classes in England in local and national activities. The effect on the drama was that the basis on which drama later arose—the traditional ballads of the minstrels—was a national, not a class possession. Guizot's examination of the origins of drama in England is incomplete, and, to some extent, unfair. His aversion, as a supporter of the Revolution, from the Church and all its works, leads him to give undue prominence to the part played by traditional minstrelsy in creating the new art. He suggests that the growing impulse towards drama, originally created elsewhere, was diverted by the Church to its own purposes in the Mysteries. But he admits that the earliest germs of drama in England are liturgical; and his own argument, that primitive drama

generally arises from religious emotions, also points the same way. Indeed, though we may think of the Middle Ages in terms of Robin Hood and Merrie England, it is a misreading of history to minimize the domination of religion in that period. The Church was the centre of almost all the ideas and activities of the Middle Ages. Although the popular minstrelsy had its part in the formation of English drama, the real foundation undoubtedly was the Miracle Plays. The effect they exercised was more upon form than upon matter, and it is doubtful if Guizot is right in assigning to the clerical influence the 'serious and moral character' of English drama, as compared with foreign, at its inception. No doubt the greater importance of the Moralities in England than in other countries affected the contents of the drama of which they were part-ancestor; but it is possible that the difference observed by Guizot is due in part to national character and to the feeling of the time, when the Reformation and the Renaissance produced a vigorous curiosity among the whole nation in those moral questions which had previously been the monopoly of the Church.

Nevertheless Guizot's examination of the origins of English drama is of the utmost value. It is the first attempt in France to criticize Shakespeare historically, not absolutely, and the standpoint from which Guizot approaches the question tacitly justifies Shakespeare's anti-classic system.

The brief biography which precedes his direct criticism of Shakespeare's works does not require detailed comment. It is refreshing, after Voltaire, to find writings about Shakespeare that err, as these do, if anything on the side of kindness. Here, as elsewhere in Guizot, we find traces of neo-classic ideas not yet cast off. He finds it necessary to explain how Shakespeare, uneducated as he was, possessed

“the elegance which is the usual accompaniment” of education. Nowadays we look rather askance on this quality; we should repudiate its use as a term of praise of Shakespeare, as Arnold did on behalf of Homer.

In his historical inquiry Guizot was handicapped everywhere, in comparison with later critics, by the vagueness and inaccuracy of contemporary scholarship. He places *Gorboduc* and *The Spanish Tragedy* together in time; and the deductions he makes from the chronological order of Shakespeare’s plays are mostly vitiated by the rearrangement effected by later scholarship in that order. It is unnecessary to point out the mistakes of this kind, which could not be avoided: and owing to the soundness and depth of Guizot’s chief premises they affect his most important arguments very little. But it is unfair for him to prove the presence of Shakespeare’s work in *Pericles* by these words: ‘If, during Shakespeare’s lifetime, any other man could have combined power and truth in so high a degree in the delineation of natural feelings, England would then have possessed another poet.’ Evidently Guizot’s historical researches had not been sufficiently wide to disprove for him the common French conception of Shakespeare as a single genius in an age otherwise completely barren. Even in his preliminary consideration of English drama he makes no mention of Marlowe, save for censure.

The consideration of Shakespeare’s early work—his collaboration in early tragedies, and his first original work in the early group of comedies—leads on to one of the most valuable passages in the book, a discussion of Shakespearean comedy in relation to the general principles of the art.

The distinction established in Greek drama between tragedy and comedy is due, he thinks, to the order and

regularity of Greek life, which medieval Europe entirely lacked. Ancient life and art was made of harmony, modern of contrast: and since, in the Middle Ages, the whole of life was confusion and contradiction, comedy and tragedy became mingled in art as they were in life. This argument is well founded; but too much is made of the essential harmony of Greek life. Greek tragedy contained its scenes almost of farce, just as did the liturgical drama of medieval England, as shown in the *Alcestis*, the *Orestes*, and the *Choephoraë*. The religious significance of Greek tragedy was bound to make them rare. But we find a difficulty in believing that the sublime and the ridiculous were less closely allied for the Greeks than for us, for their alliance is surely a law of nature. The truth is that Greek art did not provide a true basis for the neo-classic doctrine which repudiated the mixture of comic and tragic. Many French writers had tried to fasten this doctrine on the Greeks, and Guizot, in following them, shows another minute trace of neo-classicism. France, he says, became disposed, earlier than England, to maintain the distinction (between tragedy and comedy) 'ordained by the classical authorities'. Now no hard-and-fast distinction such as existed in French neo-classic tragedy had been ordained by the classical authorities. Even by Guizot, therefore, Aristotle is made responsible for what he did not say.

English drama, being based on the vitality and freedom of Teutonic manners, found a different and more natural development. In comedy the influence of the Church reduced the immorality which characterized comedy elsewhere, and so 'deprived it of that malicious and sustained gaiety which constitutes the essence of comedy'. This criticism is one of the most striking illustrations that can be found of the difference between the French and English outlook. We have noticed the distinction before between

French wit and English humour: it is here stated more explicitly than anywhere else. But the pith of the sentence lies in Guizot's claim that it is this malicious gaiety that 'constitutes the essence of comedy'. This entirely fails to satisfy our English taste. It represents only one half, and, as we feel, the inferior half, of comedy. Moreover, Guizot seems to be falling into the error of laying down unalterable limits to art. He observes that English comedy admits emotions which make it not comedy but '*mélodrame*'—or, as we should call it, 'romance'. That is, he is subdividing dramatic art into far more than the two original divisions of comedy and tragedy. The distinction really rests on this problem—whether, or how far, the laughter evoked by the comedy of Molière, the malicious gaiety which Guizot demands, is different from the laughter evoked by *Twelfth Night* or *Pickwick*. Both evoke laughter, and though they proceed by different paths, the intention of both is the same—the malicious ridicule of Molière has no didactic purpose, as Swift's satire had; it aims, just as Shakespeare mainly does in his comedies, merely at evoking laughter. It seems that Guizot's distinction is not truly fundamental; though probably it was so to him, inasmuch as the comedy of humour evokes laughter less readily from a Frenchman than an Englishman, for the French mind tends rather towards wit. The true distinction, in English drama, between comedy and tragedy, lies not in the denouement, as Guizot says, but in the atmosphere; that is why *Measure for Measure* is not truly a comedy in spite of its happy ending.

Shakespeare, thus excluded from 'true comedy', found his outlet in romance, into which he put everything, except 'the ensemble which, making every part concur towards the same end, reveals at every step the depth of the plan, and the grandeur of the work'. It is strange to find such

qualities as these claimed for any kind of comedy. They appear to us to be the exclusive possession of the higher forms of drama. But to the French comedy is a higher form than it is to us. Perhaps it is the 'serious and moral character' of English life and literature that has reduced comedy to a mere amusement, while tragedy is a true recreation.

We cannot deny that these qualities are not to be found in Shakespeare's comedies; it is no disparagement to say so, for we do not find them in any comic writer. But the examples by which Guizot seeks to prove his point are ill chosen. To say that Angelo, in *Measure for Measure*, becomes a villain because the plot demands it, displays entire misreading of the play. And when Guizot proceeds to enumerate the five plays in which Shakespeare tried to write true comedy, he is even more original. The plays are *The Tempest*, *Merry Wives*, *Timon*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. It is impossible to discover on what plan Guizot is working here: *The Tempest* is not fantastic, he observes, because in it all is coherent and consistent; why more so there than in the *Winter's Tale*, is hard to say. And there seems to be no reason for the classing of *Troilus* and *Timon* as comedies at all: indeed, Guizot perceives, as well he might, that *Troilus* lacks the 'mirthful physiognomy' of true comedy.

The true division of Shakespeare's plays must be into romantic and real. In the latter, the comic element appears where it is needed—the definitely Romantic trend of Guizot's criticism is shown by his tacit assumption that the mixture of tones can be not only allowable, but necessary.

The histories differ from the tragedies in this: that in the former, the action is directed by events; in the latter, by character. This is the first appreciation in

France of the essential greatness of Shakespeare's dramatic plan, the domination of human character over all else. And the distinction is a true one; Guizot carries it too far, however, when he says that in the histories many scenes do nothing to facilitate the action, while in the tragedies everything has its importance in relation to the central character. This is not precisely true; the sub-plot in *Lear* has little relation, until the denouement, to Lear himself; its main importance being to double, by reflexion, the effect of the main plot. Still, the general theory that Guizot is enunciating is right, and he continues by discussing with great insight Shakespeare's tragic conception—man in conflict with fate, yet not circumscribed in action. Some of the applications he makes of this theory are not justified; but the theory is at bottom that of most modern critics, and Guizot is the first French critic to perceive it—indeed his predecessors would never have thought of looking for a tragic conception in Shakespeare. Guizot's great advance is his insistence on fundamental, not artificial, premises. He raises an interesting point when he says that, alongside the impartiality which always showed the good in bad men and the bad in good men—the 'truth to fact' that Dowden insisted on,—Shakespeare 'sees nothing without judging it'; that he could never have understood Iago had he not detested him. But surely to judge and to hate are not the same. He judged Iago pitilessly, as a symptom of that unnatural evil which must fail because it is unnatural. But his business was to display and to judge (by inference, not directly), not to hate. If we do not hate one of his characters, we may be sure Shakespeare did not. We may shudder at Iago, Goneril, Macbeth: we do not loathe them as we loathe Regan and Cornwall.

This admirable passage, to which only minor exceptions

can be taken, is followed by a censure of Shakespeare's art. He often spoils his dramatic effect by the profusion of his imagination: his plays would be improved—as Jonson thought—by having some scenes cut out. It is a great pity that Guizot did not perceive how truly dramatic an effect is attained when Shakespeare's imagination appears to hold up the action—as in the frenzied speeches of Macbeth: 'Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!"' or in these words of Lear—

Poor naked wretches, whoso e'er you are,  
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm.

And as regards excisions, many people have noticed that when, for acting purposes, a scene is omitted, however unimportant it appeared to be, the play always loses something. *Julius Caesar*, as generally acted, without the first scene of the fourth Act, is not what Shakespeare intended: Antony was to him not all a hero.

Next comes the first French examination of the problem of the *Sonnets*. Guizot's view, which is evidently the result of careful study, is much the same as that of Sir Sidney Lee—that the *Sonnets* are merely an exercise in the fashionable manner of Elizabethan poetry, and that since sonneteers differ as little in matter as in form, they are of little value to the biographer. It is probably true that no certain deductions can be made from the *Sonnets*; but it is asking too much of human curiosity to deny us the opportunity of searching them for the facts of Shakespeare's life.

In the section that follows, which considers the course of Shakespeare's reputation after his death, a single sentence shows how far Guizot has travelled from the neo-classic position: his fame, says Guizot, was barely injured by the efforts of Jonson and the classicists to 'render tragedy and comedy tiresome'. Nevertheless, Guizot is some distance



behind his English contemporaries: his statement that Johnson 'vigorously defended' Shakespeare's Romantic method, may be contrasted with Hazlitt's attack on Johnson in the preface to the *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. This paragraph naturally concludes with a reference to the conflict, in which Shakespeare was playing a leading part, raging in France at the time Guizot wrote. And he observes that the classicists need not imagine that in copying Shakespeare they are throwing aside order in favour of confusion, for Shakespeare has his own art and his own order, though it is not that of classic tragedy.

This heretical pronouncement is the dawn we have awaited so long. The most advanced of Shakespeare's admirers in France had, as we have seen, failed to find in his plays any system or plan. And Guizot's statement is backed by the most important passage in his book, a brilliant consideration of the essence of dramatic art.

To consider this passage fully would be to write a complete treatise on the bases of dramatic art. The line of argument, stated briefly, is this. The dramatist, unlike the artist in any other form, depends not on a single impression but upon a series of coherent impressions, changing analogously to the situation but never breaking their continuity. This is accomplished by the relation which is established between each character and the audience, established not by the dramatist directly, but by his characters; so that events have no importance except as affecting a character: 'Man alone is the subject of drama.' A storm on an empty stage is to us nothing but an ingenious conjuring trick; but, as Guizot says, when the rain falls upon the actual Lear whose union with ourselves has already been established, then we are willing to accept it as rain, since it affects him in the same manner as actual rain would do. It is this sympathy which, as Guizot

rightly insists, constitutes dramatic illusion. Yet he is careful to point out that absolute illusion is not only impossible but undesirable. Clearly *Lear* would be unbearable if we completely believed in its actuality. What Guizot demands is what Coleridge demanded for the poet of the supernatural—the 'willing suspension of disbelief'.

Moreover, he continues, since illusion is based on nothing except this sympathy, no stage effects or other aids can increase it. The accuracy of his argument is shown by his prophecy that over-profuse staging may indeed injure the illusion by distracting the attention from the dramatic to the pictorial effect. The truth of this is obvious to any one who frequents the modern theatre; but Guizot was able to reach the same conclusion by purely deductive reasoning.

Now since illusion rests only on human sympathy, no other unity is necessary to drama except that of 'impression'; that is, the impression of truth created for the audience by the sympathy established between them and the living characters of the stage. Intervals of time are of no importance as long as they do not break the thread of identity of the character whose union with us has been established. But, Guizot proceeds, when the play does not centre round a single dominating character, the absence of the unity of time is liable to injure more seriously the unity of impression. Hence in the historical plays Shakespeare did everything possible to conceal the lapse of time. An excellent examination follows of the means adopted by Shakespeare for this purpose in *Richard II*, and also in the fourth Act of *Macbeth*. Although Guizot has previously said that Shakespeare, caring little for fame, expended too little trouble upon his works, this criticism shows that he had perceived how Shakespeare was always able to overcome, by the use of every means known to the

master-craftsman of drama, the difficulties of his material. The unities, then, are merely means, except the unity of action; for this is essential to the unity of impression, and to attain this Shakespeare arranges always that the centre of the action is also the centre of interest. This is perfectly true, but Guizot is wrong when he adds that 'the agent is the hero'. In *Othello* and *Lear*, and in the second part of *Hamlet*, the hero never directs the action; but the events which we see all derive their importance solely from their relation to him. Even in *Lear*, where there are two actions nearly distinct from one another, the unity of impression is unbroken, since in each conflict the characters with whom we sympathize are struggling with the same dominating evil embodied in the same persons. But, as Guizot says, in Racine's *Andromaque* the unity of impression is broken, because the interest and sympathy are claimed for the opposed forces of Hermione and Andromaque.

By this theory of the unity of impression Guizot also justifies the mixture of tones; for if the central character controls the impression throughout, nothing save that which destroys the impression of the character can destroy unity: and this is the justification, as Guizot perceives, of the appearance of Arthur in prison and of Macduff's son. Moreover, he adds, scenes of low life have their importance in preparing for the actions of the principal characters—for instance, the opening scenes of *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*. Once again Guizot has perceived the greatness of Shakespeare's artistry, the certainty with which he obtains the maximum possible effect from the situation he has set out to portray: but it seems that Guizot does not realize that these effects, which he so much admires, could never have been attained by a dramatist who expended little trouble upon his work. He appreciates the whole great plan of Shakespeare's art, but not the consummate details.

But, even with this qualification, Guizot's great essay remains the best French criticism of Shakespeare until recent years. There is so much to learn from him that it is unworthy to pick holes in his criticism, even where that is possible. His analysis of Shakespeare's dramatic method and of his conception of tragedy may be said to have dealt the death-blow to classicism. All his conclusions are inevitable; and since the premises upon which he bases them must be admitted by every one who has thought out the essential character of drama as a form of art, his whole argument is unshakable. And it is in every direction destructive of the classical code. Although the conflict continued until 1827, the blow which actually decided it was dealt by Guizot six years earlier.

In addition to the general essay Guizot contributed to the whole work prefaces to some of the plays, the most important being those on *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. That on *Hamlet* is an excellent example of Guizot's ability to apply his general theory, with valuable results, to a particular case. *Hamlet*, he says, shows Shakespeare's usual method of unity in variety: the unifying impression of the whole work is the thought of death, which dominates the feelings of every one, each from a different point of view. The play, like Hamlet himself, suffers from melancholy. Guizot's conception of Hamlet's character is akin to that of Professor Bradley: the feeling that 'the time is out of joint' is what oppresses Hamlet, far more than the necessity that lies on him to put it right. The keen appreciation of Guizot is shown in his perception of the correspondence between the character of Hamlet and that of the whole play; and his remarks about the dominance of death over the whole conception are excellent criticism. But, he adds, *Hamlet* exemplifies all the faults of Shakespeare—confusion,

coarseness, and undramatic reflections. This opinion, like much of Guizot's detailed criticism, has a neo-classic tone still: and the conclusion of the note on *Hamlet* almost takes us back to the days of Voltaire: 'In point of genius, Shakespeare has perhaps no rivals; but in the high and pure region of art, he cannot be taken as a model.'

The traces of neo-classicism are even more noticeable in the note that precedes *Julius Caesar*. Here, as on *Hamlet*, much of Guizot's criticism is invaluable: he perceives, what Voltaire had never seen—that the play rests upon the character of Brutus, and is dominated by the spirit of Caesar. But the neo-classic conception of the stately, dignified Roman is evidently responsible for the following: 'Cassius . . . bears much greater resemblance to a comrade of Canute or of Harold than to a Roman of the time of Caesar; but this barbarian tint throws over the character of Cassius an interest which would not perhaps arise with such liveliness from the historical resemblance.' Not only does the second sentence entirely demolish the position which Guizot had tried to construct; but the whole criticism is antagonistic to his own theory of illusion, since to make Cassius historically accurate (supposing that were possible) and therefore entirely different to ourselves, is to imperil the sympathy established between him and us.

This note is perhaps the weakest portion of the book. Upon *Macbeth*, *Lear*, and *Othello*, his notes contain some admirable analyses of character. The contrasted changes of feeling in *Macbeth* and Lady *Macbeth* after the murder are carefully explained. Especially on Lady *Macbeth*, Guizot sets the tone for most later criticism. Cordelia here receives the first whole-hearted tribute paid in France to any of Shakespeare's heroines. Guizot fails, perhaps, to apply his theory in this instance, for he finds the unifying idea of the play in man's struggle with misfortune: that

is a general expression of Shakespeare's whole tragic conception, but the struggle in *Lear* is not so much with misfortune as with hate—it is a picture of Hell broken loose on earth. In *Othello*, also, the characters occupy Guizot's chief attention; for it was these, he rightly says, and not the story he found in Cinthio, that interested Shakespeare; and he finally adds—anticipating Dumas's famous phrase—'Genius manifests itself by creating man himself'. All the characters have life apart from the events, which merely constitute the stage on which Shakespeare bids his characters appear. Guizot has perceived that unequalled vitality in Shakespeare's characters, which leads critics almost unconsciously to discuss them as though they were historical or even living persons. Guizot is also the first Frenchman to perceive something of Iago's character. He has not completely analysed it, but he perceives that egotism which Professor Bradley has found in Iago, and this sentence shows a glimpse of Hazlitt's and Swinburne's conception of the character: Iago . . . 'enjoys the evil he has done as if it were a proof of his superiority'. Shakespeare's delineation of the passion of love in *Romeo and Juliet* is finely appreciated, but the affectation of the language, especially in Romeo, is naturally—and perhaps with some justice—censured. But Guizot fails to see in Mercutio the outlet of Shakespeare's gay and overflowing imagination. He quotes the traditional saying of Shakespeare that, had he not killed Mercutio in the third Act, he would have been killed by him: but he does not see that this is a tribute to the vitality of the character, who not only lives but directs his own actions. Shakespeare had perceived that Mercutio was getting beyond his control, as later Falstaff completely did. It is strange that Guizot did not observe this, which is a quality of all great and true characterization.

Guizot has been allowed more space than any other critic yet considered; but this is fully warranted by his double importance, as the first great French critic of Shakespeare and as the most powerful force in the struggle between the Classic and Romantic schools. Destructive as he was to classicism, he was clear-sighted and fair-minded enough to perceive that the new drama must not be an imitation of Shakespeare any more than of Racine, but a new and organic growth. This moderation is less noticeable in his successors on the side of romanticism.

The years 1823-24 saw the publication of two important works—an essay on *Hamlet* by de Barante, Guizot's collaborator; and the tremendous onslaught of romanticism, *Racine et Shakespeare*, by Henri Beyle (who wrote under the pseudonym of Stendhal). In spite of its title this latter work has not very much to do with Shakespeare, nor, indeed, with Racine either. Its importance is in the controversy about general dramatic theory, not in the cognate one about Shakespeare's merits as poet and dramatist. Stendhal frequently uses Shakespeare for purposes of illustration; but neither his knowledge nor his appreciation of him seems to be of a very high order. He speaks of *The Tempest* as 'mediocre'—this was one of the few comedies that Guizot allowed himself to admire—and elsewhere, citing examples of Shakespeare's dramatic use of natural description, he finds such a passage where no one else, surely, has perceived it—in the speech of Antony in the Forum. At the same time, a laudatory reference to Massinger shows that he had studied English drama.

Stendhal's attack on the classic system, vigorous and interesting as it is, lacks the depth of thought that characterizes Guizot's criticism. Indeed, it is hard not to feel that some of his demands are made not because his principles require them but because the classic code denies

them. His two main theses, which he develops more than once, are these: Romantic literature is that which gives most pleasure to people in the actual condition of their habits and beliefs; Classic, that which would give most pleasure to their great grandparents: and secondly, Romantic drama is a prose tragedy which occupies several months and is laid in various places. Now the first of these two dicta—the 'dazzling antithesis' as Lessing might have called it—is, as Lacroix observes, amusing but unsatisfactory. Indeed it leads Stendhal into an almost ridiculous position, for he is forced to class Racine as a Romantic poet—indeed every one of the world's great writers has been Romantic except Virgil, Tasso, and Terence. Clearly what he means is that a great writer never imitates another great writer; this is true, and indeed trite; but it is not to the point. The French neo-classic system of tragedy, though some of its adherents claimed that it was based on Greek tragedy, was in fact an art-form distinct from the source from which it arose, just as Elizabethan drama was an art-form distinct from the medieval drama and the tragedy of Seneca, which combined to produce it. It is clear from Stendhal's second definition of Romantic drama that Racine cannot be classed under this head, even though Stendhal claims that he should be. But this second definition is also incomplete. Stendhal is bound to admit that *The Tempest*, although it conflicts with all the three cardinal qualities by which he defines romanticism, is Romantic nevertheless. He has, in fact, fallen into the common error of revolutionary critics: he abolishes the existing rules and substitutes others nearly as tyrannical as they were.

Much of his book is taken up with a well-reasoned refutation of the main tenets of classicism, especially the unities and the pompous etiquette of French tragedy. The



fundamental unsoundness of the arguments which bolstered up the unities had perhaps never been more clearly proved. Stendhal's objection to the unities is of course based on *vraisemblance*, but in considering this he makes an analysis of the question of illusion which is far less acute than Guizot's. As we saw, Châteaubriand had no conception of real illusion at all—he felt all the time that it was 'only a play'; this no doubt represents the extreme neo-classic position in regard to the question of illusion, and Stendhal naturally represents the extreme opposite. To him the perfect illusion is constituted by complete belief in the actuality of the scene, and he cites as an example the spectator at Baltimore who shot Othello as he was about to smother Desdemona. This feeling, he admits, can only last for a moment of time: the more numerous such moments are in any play, the better the play. Of course the argument is absurd, for in tragedy at least this perfect illusion would make the spectacle not pleasant, but intolerable, as it was to the soldier of Baltimore. There is no doubt that this complete illusion does take place—an instance is recorded in England, also in connexion with *Othello*, and with children it is almost universal—but it is not that which the tragic author desires to produce. This is a symptom of what was the real defect of Stendhal's work, as Lamartine pointed out. His great demand was for the faithful imitation of nature, but he forgot that art has a function of beauty as well as of naturalism. The truth he demanded was material rather than ideal truth. No doubt this was because it was the first quality that French tragedy chiefly lacked; to restore it to tragedy was a means of attaining the true end of art, ideal truth; but Stendhal, like the Realists of later years, demands only the means, and seems to consider them an end in themselves.

Stendhal, in fact, suffers from the faults of all extremists. The abuses he denounced disappeared; but the reforms he advocated did not take their place—fortunately, for his reaction against classicism carried him beyond the limits determined not by tradition or the taste of a period, but by the feeling of the French nation and (as regards some of his theories) by the fundamental principles of dramatic art.

The essay of de Barante on *Hamlet*, short as it is, is worthy of Guizot's collaborator. The tone is Romantic and indeed modern. Even Guizot concluded his note on this play with a censure of Shakespeare's faults as here displayed; de Barante adopts the modern position of the analyst, not the judge. To him the dominating idea of the piece is not death, as in Guizot's view, but meditation. All the characters, each in his own way, deal with the problem that, as Guizot said, confronted Hamlet—the problem that evidently confronted Shakespeare—'the time is out of joint'. The keen insight of this essay is characteristic of the best French criticism. De Barante perceives the melancholy, rather than sorrow, into which the death of his father has thrown Hamlet. It is this that predisposes him to act as he does, when the Ghost's revelation has been made.

A criticism of great interest follows. De Barante observes that the denouement seems to come almost by chance, as is consonant with the plan he has found of the play, which is throughout a variation on the theme of scepticism. Many readers must at first sight have felt the construction of *Hamlet* to be weaker than that of the other great tragedies, for this reason. De Barante has observed the parallelism between the character of Hamlet and the character of the play; and, as he well suggests, the play halts, proceeds, hesitates, exactly as Hamlet does—and,

moreover, for exactly the same reason, that fatal disposition for meditation which de Barante observes in all the characters—and finally seems to reach its goal, as Hamlet does his, almost by accident. Of course this argument, as here briefly stated, does not do justice to Shakespeare's genius in the coherence and form of the whole work. The denouement is not accidental, even the particular course it takes is determined by previous events or by character. Nevertheless, most people would agree with de Barante's fine imaginative conception of the action of the play struggling through the storms of doubt towards an end never foreseen.

Some interesting criticisms of detail follow, and de Barante concludes with a censure of Ducis's *Hamlet*, which completely lacks the profundity of Shakespeare. The reference to Ducis and his period makes us realize how far we have travelled since then. To Voltaire and his contemporaries it would have been unthinkable even to look for a vast philosophic conception dominating the whole of one of Shakespeare's plays—those 'monstrous farces' which were composed of a mere disorderly confusion. Criticism, properly so-called, of Shakespeare began only with Guizot.

Yet classicism was not dead. The earlier portion of Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* produced a situation parallel to that of Voltaire's last campaign. The Academy granted a public reading to the attack made by Auger on the Romantics, and particularly on Stendhal. No advance was visible from Voltaire's position: Shakespeare is to Auger still savage and ridiculous. It was in answer to this manifesto that the second portion of *Racine et Shakespeare* was written. The established literary journals, like their English contemporaries, held out firmly against the new order: the *Journal des Débats* was still the strong-

hold of classicism, but Geoffroy's successors failed to rival the vigour of his attacks. The *Essais littéraires sur Shakespeare* of Paul Duport may be taken as the last expression in France of the orthodox view of Shakespeare. For victory was at hand: it was in 1827 that there appeared Victor Hugo's play of *Cromwell* with its famous Preface, the crowning stroke of the Romantic attack. It was in this same year that an English company headed by Kemble performed Shakespeare in Paris to enthusiastic audiences, though four years before a similar attempt had been driven from the stage. In fact, this year, as Lacroix says, was the year of the revolution in literature; and though the credit for this is largely due to Guizot and Stendhal, the striking position occupied by the Preface of *Cromwell* in this victory justifies the importance which literary historians have given to it.

Victor Hugo was at bottom much more revolutionary than any of his predecessors in the study of Shakespeare, even Stendhal. His whole outlook was more alien than theirs from that of the eighteenth century. He was not an anti-classic on general grounds, but a medievalist. His admiration for Spanish literature was profound, and he was the first French critic who not only justified but ardently admired the most characteristic features of medieval art. And, arguing from this point of view, he finds the characteristic quality of medieval, and therefore of Romantic, art in the 'grotesque'.

Hugo finds that art has passed through three stages—that of the ode, exemplified by Genesis; that of the epic, by Homer; that of the drama, by Shakespeare. Each stage of civilization contains the germ of the next, so that the grotesque is not unknown to the ancients. By this criticism Hugo has resolved a dilemma which, as we have seen, puzzled so many French critics, especially Voltaire

and Châteaubriand—the presence of scenes of low comedy in some Greek tragedies, such as the *Alcestis* and *Orestes*. Ancient life, says Hugo, was single and uniform: medieval life was double, for the dominance of the new religion showed man that all his life was made up of two parts—of heaven and earth, of soul and body. And, as in every sphere all things were thus confused, the sublime and the ridiculous, which in ancient art had been nearly distinct, became confounded in the grotesque. ✓

The argument by which Hugo advances this theory of the grotesque, a favourite one with him, is on the whole a fine piece of historical criticism; but the details with which he attempts to support it show a tendency, which often appears in his criticism, to twist the facts to suit the argument. It is hardly just to say that Pindar is ‘more epic than lyric’, and it is pushing the argument far, in view of such a play as *Hippolytus*, to find always in Greek drama the solemn and lofty epic style of Homer.

Finally the grotesque and the beautiful blended to produce Shakespeare. This is ‘the poetic summit of modern times: Shakespeare is the drama . . . the form proper to the third state of civilization, the literature of reality’. No one in France, not even Nodier with his *Pensées de Shakespeare*, had equalled the enthusiasm of this pronouncement. Shakespeare’s greatness had been admitted, but not his absolute pre-eminence among all authors living or dead. Victor Hugo has won the battle for Shakespeare’s fame at last.

[In the drama Hugo finds the complete and all-embracing form of art, of which the earlier forms, the ode and the epic, are only parts: and modern literature always tends towards the drama, as shown in the works of Milton and Dante, for it is this form that has been born of Christianity and the double life which it gave to modern Europe. ✓ It is

very doubtful if Hugo is right in calling drama the final form of art to which others develop. No doubt drama is always preceded by the primitive epic, such as the *Iliad* or the historical books of the Old Testament; but history has seemed to show that great drama arises suddenly in the early stages of a nation's growth, attains a rapid maturity, and soon sinks into insignificance. It has been argued with some reason that great tragedy has no place in a modern and complete civilization. Hugo, in this argument, seems to confuse the drama, as a form of art, with the natural and all-embracing conception which is common to most forms of modern art—Chaucer and the English novelists as much as Shakespeare. 'The characteristic of drama is reality', he says; but, while we may admit this to be true in regard to Shakespeare, Hugo himself has denied it to Sophocles, and would do so to Racine, yet both must be included in a survey of drama. It is true, as he says, that Shakespearean drama contains the most startling contrasts and the strangest juxtapositions; but this is a characteristic of Shakespeare rather than of drama. The whole argument is to prove the necessity of the grotesque in drama; it can be used effectively even alongside the sublime, as in the juxtaposition of Lear and the Fool on the heath. Hugo is the first French critic to appreciate these scenes.

Hugo proceeds to deliver yet another attack on the neo-classic rules; it is a more telling one than Stendhal's, for Hugo is more moderate and has a clearer conception of the essentials of the problem. He explains the improbabilities which the unities are bound to produce; and meets an objection, that the intervals of time and changes of place distract the interest, with this profoundly true reply: 'It is exactly there that the difficulties of art lie: . . . it is the part of genius to overcome them, not that of

canons of poetry (*aux poétiques*) to evade them.' 'This well illustrates the advantage which Hugo had over his contemporary critics by reason of his own dramatic genius. The creative artist need not be a critic, nor the critic a creative artist; but the combination of the two is exceptionally powerful.

In a vein of brilliant raillery, Hugo next overturns the common neo-classic demand 'Imitate the models!'—by showing that the proposed models, for instance Virgil and Racine, are only imitations of other models. Further, he adds with justifiable ridicule, these neo-classic critics cannot possibly be satisfied, since they tell us in one breath to imitate the models—in another, that the models are inimitable; and every new work is met either with the cry, 'this is like nothing at all', or with this—'this is like everything else'. This kind of criticism is unfortunately not dead yet. As we shall see, Hugo himself had not completely shaken off the conception of the critic as occupying the position of a judge; and as long as this conception dominates criticism, so long will the necessity remain of definite standards of judgement.

The time has come, says Hugo, to substitute nature and truth for the outworn rules and conventions. But, he adds—and this shows clearly how much deeper and truer is his thought than Stendhal's—the truth of art is not absolute reality; the domains of art and of nature are perfectly distinct. Hugo represents in France, as Coleridge does in England, the true and complete Romantic outlook, which stops short of the extreme and impossible demand for nature in Wordsworth and Stendhal. He did not merely demand something which was lacking in the classic system; he demanded those qualities which his dramatic insight found necessary for tragedy—for instance, poetry, which Stendhal had excluded, because classical tragedy

was in verse. Whether poetry or prose should be used is, Hugo thinks, a secondary question : each has its advantage, and it is for the creative genius to decide on the instrument he requires for any particular purpose. Here is the true advance—not the substitution of one rule for another, but the privilege, indeed the necessity, of genius to make its own 'road where none has gone before', as Voltaire had said a hundred years before. But there is one particular kind of verse which Hugo, very justly, utterly excludes from drama—the stately conventional verse which had been considered until then an essential of tragedy.

The conclusion of the essay, after a passage which serves as introduction to the play of *Cromwell*, is a demand for a new kind of criticism—the analytical rather than the judicial criticism—a demand that, as has been seen, should have been made long before. As Hugo says, it was indeed time that the method of the eighteenth century was abandoned—that abstract reason which, working from principles based on no fundamental truth, sat in judgement upon an artist without considering either the actual foundations of art or the particular circumstances under which the artist worked.

And in spite of the illogicality which he sometimes displays, Hugo is the first true critic, in this sense, of Shakespeare in France, save Guizot ; and, though his contribution to Shakespearean criticism is negligible when compared to Guizot's, the wider range of his book makes it an equally important factor in the discussion of general dramatic principles.

The *Essay of Villemain* on Shakespeare, published in the same year as Hugo's Preface, seems by comparison to be many years out of date. Villemain's position is little in advance of that of Châteaubriand in 1801. To him the Greeks are still the grand models ; and, however great



Shakespeare was by force of his imaginative genius, Villemain considers that we are not justified in 'speaking of the dramatic system of Shakespeare, in regarding this system as a worthy rival of the ancient drama, and finally in quoting it as the model which should be preferred'. His point of view is in fact that of the neo-classics about Shakespeare—the formless genius who threw together the whole of life without any attempt at selection or arrangement; 'Such is Shakespeare: he has no system other than his own genius', and 'his contemporaries, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Fletcher, and Beaumont, have no more and no less art than he'. We have seen how rare is the perception in France of Shakespeare's dramatic system. Even Hugo makes no specific reference to it, but we are justified in saying that he perceived it, by the whole course of his argument: he carefully differentiates art from absolute realism, and since he placed Shakespeare at the summit of the last and highest form of the world's art, he must have felt the supremacy of Shakespeare's artistry. Yet Villemain seems, like Voltaire, to have been affected unconsciously by Shakespeare's dramatic plan: 'the people, whom one meets by chance, speak words not to be forgotten. They pass: and the memory remains with us; and, in the disorder of the work, the impression which the poet makes is always powerful.' The words are too vague to permit the stressing of a conclusion based upon them; but it may be that the 'impression' to which Villemain refers is the single impression of the whole piece—the 'unity in variety' which formed so large a part of Guizot's analysis and which is in fact the main principle of Shakespeare's dramatic method. But it must be admitted that the reason why Villemain could not find the system was that he did not honestly search for it. His outlook is still restricted by his classic code. When he says that the

scenes in Shakespeare succeed each other 'without unity, either of time or of place', it is clear that no unity of any other kind than these has suggested itself to his mind.

Yet even this disorder, says Villemain, does not produce a natural effect, owing to Shakespeare's affected and contorted manner. This criticism, as we have seen, was of longer duration than any other of the eighteenth-century censures of Shakespeare; it is due to difference of national taste rather than to period, and only an ardent medievalist like Hugo can be expected to approve Shakespeare's ardent and overflowing imagination. But when Villemain, attempting to refute the extravagant criticisms of Schlegel and Hazlitt, appeals to the authority of Mrs. Montagu, as Voltaire had done to that of Rymer, this reaction is not against foreign ideas but against the progress of literary thought.

But, like Châteaubriand, Villemain is able to offer unstinted praise to Shakespeare's genius. Especially is this shown in his intensely national appeal. 'It is in England that Shakespeare belongs,' he says, 'and it is there that he should remain.' This is no doubt incomplete, but it is true as far as it goes; and with its counterpart, the modern German view of *Unser Shakespeare*, would make a complete criticism. Shakespeare, who is the most universal of modern poets, is at the same time the most national. No other English writer is so characteristic of the English character, or has expressed so completely the very essence of English life.

In dealing with the historical plays, which he admires greatly for their national truth, Villemain adopts from Guizot an argument which consorts ill with his previous censures, namely, the definite advantage which is there derived from abandonment of the unity of time. This was perfectly in accord with Guizot's general theory, but it

conflicted seriously with that of Villemain, who had found that Shakespeare, abandoning classical unities, lacked unity of any kind. He adds, with another unconscious tribute to Shakespeare's art, that the use of prose or verse for any particular scene has, almost always, some reason behind it. Even Guizot had not perceived the different uses to which Shakespeare applies his various instruments, and Villemain's observation was to lead to the inquiry that has shown how and why Shakespeare has rung the changes on song, rhyme, blank verse, and prose in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example.

Of Villemain's eulogies it is unnecessary to say much—for eulogy is becoming common—save to mention his fine appreciation of Shakespeare's characterization, especially of women. Collins's opinion of Shakespeare as a delineator of feminine character was dying at last. Of Shakespeare's comedies Villemain well remarks, 'one would say that Rabelais was writing comedy'. This is probably not meant to be praise; but it is sound criticism nevertheless, for Shakespeare and Rabelais, 'the comic Homer', as Hugo later called him, were alike in the medieval richness and complete freedom of their imaginations.

Villemain, as a critic of Shakespeare, offers strange contradictions. Alongside Hugo and Guizot he seems reactionary; but in certain directions his appreciation, even his understanding, of Shakespeare equals and almost surpasses theirs.

Between the publication of the Preface to *Cromwell* and the complete victory, in 1830, of the new order, the most important pronouncements were those of Alfred de Vigny and Emile Deschamps. These three years represent the climax of the conflict between the Classics and Romantics: the Preface to *Cromwell* had created a great sensation; Hugo's greatness as a practical dramatist rein-

forced his theories to such an extent that the champions of the old order actually attempted to have his plays suppressed.

The romance of de Vigny, *Cinq-Mars*, published in 1827, contained a valuable Preface on the truth of art, a pronouncement which did good service in resisting the extremes to which the realism of the new school was being carried. These theories were often derived from Hugo, who, many years later, found it necessary to repudiate the unfair use which had been made of a phrase he had once used—'Art for Art's sake'. Nevertheless, it is unfair on the part of Lacroix to assign to Hugo's Preface this demand for naturalism alone, and to credit de Vigny with the discovery of its proper counterpart—the necessity of ideal rather than actual truth. In the situation in which Hugo wrote it was reasonable to direct his argument in the most necessary direction; hence his insistence on reality: but his criticism was deep enough to include the reservation, that ideal truth was the true reality, which Stendhal had never perceived. Had Lacroix's cavil been directed at Stendhal it would have had more justice.

De Vigny's argument is in effect an expansion of the doctrine of Aristotle, the relation between drama and history. What is necessary, he says, is not 'the authenticity of the facts, but the truth of the observation of human nature'. The only standard by which to judge art is ideal beauty; truth is secondary. 'We believe in Othello, as much as in Richard III whose monument stands at Westminster.' In fact, he might have added, the reality of Othello and Richard III, is to many people precisely similar, because it arises from the same source—Shakespeare.

The work of Émile Deschamps, *Études poétiques françaises et étrangères*, though published in 1829, had probably

been written before this, and may therefore be considered together with the other pronouncements of the year of revolution, 1827. A dramatic revolution seems to Deschamps absolutely necessary, since France is 'the most dramatic nation of Europe', and is also, he thinks, pre-eminent in poetry at this period. In making these two claims Deschamps shows a restricted view which, in view of the continental vogue of Byron, and Deschamps's real enthusiasm for Shakespeare, we should not have expected.

Deschamps, though he ardently desires reform—for progress is necessary to the life of drama—fails to accompany the leaders of the Romantic revival in demanding a new and organic growth: he suggests Shakespeare as a model, instead of the classics, and proceeds to justify his selection. Hugo was nearer the mark when he said that the model and the method were for the creative genius to decide upon.

As regards direct criticism of Shakespeare, the following opinion of Deschamps seems to show a lack both of appreciation and of understanding: Shakespeare must be expurgated before he can be presented on the French stage: but this can be done without injury to 'the construction of his pièces and the progress of the action'. In the first place, this is surely a misstatement: the action of *Measure for Measure*, even of *Othello*, must surely be injured by the removal of scenes to which prudery would take exception. Secondly, it is surely no characteristic of consummate art to contain much that can be dispensed with—much, that is to say, that is superfluous. And thirdly, Deschamps displays a lack of understanding of the real greatness of Shakespeare's dramatic construction. The action of his plays can be represented, after a fashion, in dumb-show or even on the cinema; and, in this sense, the action will not be injured by the suppression of all Shakespeare's words, polite and otherwise; but the critic has not yet been discovered who

can abstract a scene from one of the great tragedies without injuring, not the mere plot, but the total imaginative effect. In the present state of taste, expurgation of Shakespeare may be necessary, in England as in France: but let us not suppose that it is anything but a necessary evil. In spite of this criticism, however, Deschamps shows a real enthusiasm for Shakespeare's great qualities—his creative characterization, his mastery of the language of passion, the poetry of his style.

From this year (1827) onwards the revolution in literature was practically complete. The course of lectures delivered by Villemain at the Sorbonne, 1827-28, on literature, produced new adherents to the Romantic school. The last remnants of the supporters of classic regularity still fought feebly and vainly against the triumph of the Romantics; but the triumph in criticism was complete: de Remusat observed in the *Revue Française*, perhaps with the pleasant feeling of the prophet proved right, 'the glorious principle of the Revolution has triumphed in the domain of thought'; and again, 'At last we can cry joyfully, the Arts are free!' Indeed the arts were becoming almost too free. The cry of 'Art for Art's sake' was fathered on Hugo, who had never propounded it, and the extremists of the Romantic revolution began to deny the existence not only of rules but of any general principles for the drama. On the stage the influence of Shakespeare was all but paramount. Vitet and Dumas dramatized French history, clearly on the model of Shakespeare's historical plays. Dumas is, in this respect, an interesting link between the centuries. His conception of drama was no doubt derived from the study of Shakespeare; and his extraordinary technical skill in drama—almost the only quality of his that made his plays successful—served as a model to the modern French school, and for the advances which they made in technique during

continue' to 'correspond to the needs of the society in which the poet lives'. De Vigny represents the best and the most advanced form of French romanticism—that which conceives no rigid system, whether classic or realist, but organic growth. 'System', he says, must be understood in the sense of the Greek word from which it is derived—'order, the coherence of principles and consequences'.

The translation of *Othello* being the first in French verse, was, no doubt, greatly superior to any previous representation of Shakespeare in French; and de Vigny hoped that his example would result eventually in the appearance of a complete translation of Shakespeare into French verse, like that which had already been produced in German. His expectation has been fulfilled, but the task was of course much more difficult for the French than the Germans, whose dramatic blank verse approaches much more closely to Shakespeare's verse than does the French Alexandrine. The production of *Othello* also deserves remembrance for the interesting comments it called forth in the *Revue Française* in 1830 from the Duc de Broglie, entitled, 'The State of Dramatic Art in France in 1830'.

This essay has no great value as criticism, but it is very useful as the expression of a nearly impartial view of the struggle for reform. The Duke is not wholly on the side of the Romantics, though more so than on that of the Classics: his view is that of the observer of the conflict, who merely records the actions and opinions of the opposing camps. He ridicules the last champions of classicism with their cry of 'Attila-Shakespeare', the barbarous conqueror of French dramatic art; but, he adds, the victory is not yet complete: the questions whether Shakespeare can be ranked as a rival to the French masters, whether a new dramatic system must be established, are still under discussion—'the hearts of the audience have

been won, but their minds are still in suspense'. The revolution from Racine to Shakespeare was too great to be made rapidly; de Broglie observes that to most of the audience, including himself, the character of Iago seemed without meaning. The complexity of such a character is, of course, one of the most striking differences between the rich imagination of Shakespeare and the system of Racine. But for most of the great qualities of the play he has sufficient praise. And his general conclusion is that though the revolution is not yet complete, its complete success is ultimately inevitable. The new ideas gain strength daily; and the rigid neo-classic system is gone for ever. De Broglie here speaks the final word on the controversy, started by Voltaire, about the social conditions which produced and maintained the orthodox tragedy. That, he says, could be nothing but 'a pastime of good society, an amusement for people of refinement'. The whole order of society has been reborn by the Revolution; why must drama alone be exempt from the spirit of progress? Social conditions in France have received from the Revolution a new vitality; this must be expressed in the drama of the new age, if it is to satisfy the people of the new age.

The victory of romanticism, already gained in criticism, was, according to de Broglie, not yet won in popular taste: this crowning stroke was shortly to be delivered by the same leader who had taken the decisive step in criticism—Victor Hugo. During the three years 1827–30, several dramatists, especially Dumas, had obtained considerable success with historical dramas evidently inspired by Shakespeare: but the victory of the new style was not complete until the production of the great series of Hugo's dramas, beginning with *Hernani* in March 1830. In his dramatic practice Hugo was a true Romantic; though he drew his inspiration in part from Shakespeare and Spanish literature,



the conception and the form of his dramas were initiated from no model and had no predecessor. The opposition which Hugo encountered, especially from the Academy, was considerable—some of the classicists actually petitioned the king to suppress Romantic plays. It was a hopeless task; their own supporters deserted them; Soumet, whose first works for the stage had been strictly regular, had produced in 1829 *A Feast of Nero*, in which Romantic audacity was shown in the presentation on the stage of such persons as Poppaea and Locusta, whom Racine, treating the same subject, had kept decently behind the scenes; and in 1833 Delavigne, another convert to romanticism, based a play directly on an incident from Shakespeare's *Richard III*.

The three years 1827-30 are a period parallel to the two years 1776-78, the struggle over Shakespeare between Voltaire and Le Tourneur. With the instant and unequalled success of the production of *Hernani* the triumph of romanticism is complete; and the production of de Vigny's *Othello* may be said to have concluded the discussion of Shakespeare's merits. His fame in France was assured henceforth: but true criticism was yet to come. Admiration took the place of censure, but analysis, which was to depend on the careful researches of scholarship rather than the appreciations of imaginative genius, had not yet reinforced it. The next thirty years are a period of less importance than the decade we have just considered. No fundamental advance is made in the criticism of Shakespeare in France.

Through these years the French theatre is dominated by Hugo, and therefore, in a sense, by Shakespeare. The startling contrasted effects of Shakespearean drama play a large part in Hugo's dramatic practice; and his whole conception of tragedy is that which he has found in Shakespeare:

the 'union of grandeur with truth' is that which has given Shakespeare immortality, and it is this that must be the aim of great drama. The phrase is finely chosen : it would be almost impossible in so few words to describe the peculiar greatness of Shakespeare, the manner in which, in his loftiest flights of imagination, the direct appeal always remains of essential truth in his whole outlook. Nothing can be added to what Professor Dowden has said on this aspect of Shakespeare. Hugo has well expressed the truth that in art the false is the ugly.

The influence of Shakespeare was noticeable in every direction on the French stage : the demand for lively and exciting action, which the comparison of his plays with the solemn tragedy of France inevitably produced, was met by the skilfully complicated intrigues of Dumas's plays, and, in the hands of the less gifted supporters of the new order, by a degeneration of tragedy into violent melodrama as we know it to-day. Another wing of the advanced party found in Shakespeare's romances and fantasies the justification of the doctrine of 'Art for Art's sake', and repudiated Hugo's just demand, in the Preface to *Lucrèce Borgia*, that the drama must have a 'national, a social, a human mission', and that the audience shall experience 'an austere and profound moral feeling'. To them drama need only be gay, charming, and empty. Besides the influence exerted by Shakespeare on much of the original work produced on the French stage during this period, translations and adaptations of plays and parts of plays were frequent. But even to his most extravagant admirers in France Shakespeare did not seem suitable for direct transference to their stage. Dumas—who has to his credit perhaps the finest appreciation of Shakespeare ever made in a single sentence—collaborated with Paul Meurice in 1847 upon an adaptation of *Hamlet*, and concluded it with a

reappearance of the ghost, in the role of *deus ex machina*, to announce that Hamlet, who had escaped the poisoned rapier, had before him long life and prosperity on the throne of Denmark. Even if a 'happy ending' were desirable to the tragedy, Dumas would surely have perceived, had he understood anything of Hamlet's character, that he could never be happy again. Yet Lacroix, whose judgement is generally reliable, remarks of this that Shakespeare is here 'perfectly reproduced by the hand of a master'. From this criticism, which comes from one of the most careful and unprejudiced foreign critics of Shakespeare, it is clear that we must not expect too much from foreign appreciations of him. The differences of national feeling clearly prescribe limits, not easily passed, to what we feel to be a full understanding of him.

As has been said, the criticism of these years is of minor importance only. The position that has been won is being confirmed, but it was not time yet for a new advance. In 1836, Châteaubriand, in the work on English literature which accompanied his translation of Milton, made a handsome recantation of his adverse criticism of thirty years before—at a time, he said, when he had not reached an understanding of Shakespeare. About the same time Philarete Chasles traced the influence of Montaigne upon Shakespeare—an inquiry which shows that the time of mere appreciation was passing, and that of analysis was at hand. But, in general, the Shakespearean criticism of this period—and it attained considerable volume in France—was rather in the direction of extracting and appreciating particular aspects of his work, than towards ascertaining his historical position, or the deep philosophical conceptions which underlie his whole outlook. These were the discoveries of later scholarship and criticism.

But the differences of national feeling which, even in

the Romantic period, as shown by Villemain, coloured the criticism of Shakespeare in France, began to disappear. Victor Hugo *filis*, who afterwards produced a complete verse-translation of Shakespeare, published in 1855 a note on *Democracy in Shakespeare*, and in the following year M. Carlhant, in the preface to a verse-translation of *Julius Caesar*, demanded that literature must be not national, but international, as Goethe had insisted. The time was approaching when Shakespeare, the gift of England to the world, was to be the possession of all the world, the 'friend that Heaven has given to the unhappy of every age and country', as Nodier had finely said.

The examination of the later Romantic period, which for reasons of space has been necessarily brief, may fitly be concluded by an examination of the two important works which appeared between 1860 and 1870. They represent an interesting contrast in the later Romantics' view of Shakespeare. They are the Essay of Lamartine in the *Biographies of Some Celebrated People*, and Victor Hugo's great work entitled *William Shakespeare*.

Lamartine, as we have seen, played a prominent part in the Romantic revival, and had in that period acted as a check on the extreme realism of Stendhal. But now, thirty years later, he seems—in regard to Shakespeare at least—to be a lukewarm Romantic—or, to put it more precisely, a peculiar mixture of Romantic enthusiasm with Classic disapproval. It may seem an anachronism to speak of classicism as late as 1860; but the distinction did exist, and does still, though it was by that time the distinction not between progress and reaction, but between the national temperaments of France and England. There was another thing by which both Lamartine and Victor Hugo, though probably unconsciously, distorted their judgements. In reacting against opinions with which they disagreed, they

were carried beyond the due limits of sound criticism. Lamartine's reaction was against the most advanced romanticism, with its abrogation of the virtues of regularity, of form: it was against Hugo himself, the leader of this school, and the rival of Lamartine for the literary leadership of France.

This is the most charitable explanation of the censures which Lamartine directs against Shakespeare. His essay is largely occupied by quotations from the two plays with which he deals in detail—*Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*—and of their sources; it contains little actual criticism, and what criticism there is, is mostly unfavourable. Lamartine goes right back to the days of Voltaire in his main complaint—that of indecency. Even *Romeo and Juliet* supplies him with numerous examples of this: and in quoting passages he is often forced, like D'Alembert before the Academy, to expurgate Shakespeare's coarseness; though, following the same model, he is careful always to add a note directing the curious reader's attention to the original. This question is, of course, one of taste, or perhaps of convention. If a man is sincerely shocked by scenes or lines of Shakespeare, we may deplore his prudery or envy his delicacy, but there is no arguing with the feeling he experiences. Still, it is no qualification for the literary critic, whose main business is to understand and appreciate—as shown by Charles Lamb, one of the most clean-minded men that ever lived, who could appreciate and analyse the foulest scenes of Elizabethan drama. And Lamartine's taste does seem delicate to a ludicrous degree. Of this line of Juliet's—

And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead—

which he expurgates for purposes of quotation—he remarks: 'A guard-room might blush at the imagery and

expressions employed by the virgin of Verona, aged fourteen.' If the guard-rooms of France were indeed such as Lamartine supposes, the defeat of 1870 is explained.

But this trait of his criticism has a serious importance, for it shows us a curious contradiction in his outlook. Superficially it never shows itself, and this is why Lamartine did not perceive it; but his whole argument, especially about *Romeo and Juliet*, is based on two opposite fundamental ideas. On the one hand, his demand is always for naturalism: Romeo, he says, 'in Shakespeare's language more resembles the hero of Cervantes than a young man consumed by real passion'; Juliet's expressions—in that wonderful speech, 'Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds'—are 'altogether beyond the limits of what is natural'; and, to sum up, the author aims at 'wit instead of the simple and truthful exhibition of sentiment'. On the other, he seems to subscribe to all the neo-classic demands for purity and decorum of tragic style: alongside the passage quoted in the preceding paragraph, we find such criticisms as this: 'The Nurse excites Juliet's impatience by absurd procrastinations, which would be more appropriate to farce than to tragedy.' Now the character of Juliet's nurse has been admired again and again as a triumph of natural delineation; and Lamartine does not controvert this; the basis of his objection is clearly exactly opposite to this. Lamartine did partly perceive the illogicality of his position, and in dealing with that vexed question of contrast, the mixing of tones, he attempts to correlate his two opposing ideas. His objection to it is evidently due to classical influence, but he pretended otherwise. 'Laughter is prejudicial to tears, and tears to laughter: the contrast is too strong to be natural. Nothing similar is found in the sublime dramas of antiquity, because antiquity was nearer to nature than we are.' The use of Greek tragedy

as an absolute standard still persists in Lamartine; and his assumption of tears as the aim of tragedy owes its origin to the conception of 'tender' tragedy like *Zaire*. Hugo, with his demand for 'austere and profound moral feeling' to be evoked in the audience, had a higher ideal. Yet, after saying that the contrast of tones is not natural, Lamartine concludes his review of *Romeo and Juliet* with the words, 'it is the tragedy of nature; but it is not the tragedy of art'. It is like Hugo's ridicule of the cry 'Imitate the models': between Lamartine's two points of view, Shakespeare has no chance of a favourable judgement. At the same time it is fair to say that where Lamartine does approve, he appreciates nobly. His comment upon the scene of the parting of Romeo and Juliet after their marriage night is a piece of creative criticism worthy of the poetic genius of the author and of that of the critic.

Lamartine's review of *Hamlet* also consists mainly of quotation. But a valuable light is thrown on his appreciation by his conception of what is or is not necessary. Thus, the first scene, in his version, opens with the words, 'Last night of all'; that in which Hamlet and the ghost meet, with Horatio's speech, 'Look, my lord, it comes!' In each instance the suspense by which Shakespeare prepared for the ghost's appearance disappears in Lamartine's hands. Yet Lamartine fully realizes the importance played by the ghost in the effect of the tragedy: indeed, he goes even too far in adulation when he credits Shakespeare with the invention of the ghost as a capital character of the play. Wonderful as the transformation was which Shakespeare effected in his material, the use of a revengeful ghost was almost a rigid convention for the type of drama which he had set out to employ. But Lamartine was under the impression, the source of which is hard to find, that the

play was written when Shakespeare was only twenty-two, though the other details which he includes are generally accurate. Had this been true, Lamartine's claim for Shakespeare of breaking entirely new ground would have been true also. As it is, he fails to see Shakespeare's real advance, the profundity of Hamlet's character. To him, as far as we can discover, Hamlet is nothing more than a man confronted with a doubtful, difficult, and distasteful task; and the play seems to him merely a collection of complicated counter-intrigues. He never suggests any perception of the real burden that oppresses Hamlet's soul, which is not the result of the revelation of the ghost. But alongside this must be honourably mentioned his glowing appreciation of Ophelia, who comes 'like a moonbeam in a charnel-house', to shed a 'soft light over this mass of horrors': and he says elsewhere, with one of his rare appreciations of Shakespeare's artistry, 'Observe how admirably this apparently useless part of Ophelia is adapted to the purpose of mingling the pathos of pity with the horror of revenge'. Ophelia has not always been kindly treated by commentators, and Lamartine supplies a notable contrast to some of her English detractors. On all the aspects of this play Lamartine expends nothing but praise: even the grave-digger scene, to which one might have expected an objection, is selected for special admiration, and here Lamartine has a glimpse of Guizot's superb conception of the play as a series of variations on the theme of Death.

Lamartine's general judgement of Shakespeare is that which we should expect in an admirer of classic form. We find the greater art in Racine, but the greater degree of nature in Shakespeare. 'Racine knows how to choose: Shakespeare does not.' 'There is the difference between sovereign perfection and accidental verve.' And Shake-



speare is the poet peculiarly suited to the 'independent people' of England. The English are right to prefer him to all other writers, as the Greeks were right so to prefer their tragic authors, and the French theirs. In fact, the differences of national taste make an absolute order of merit impossible. Lamartine here confronts the real problem which all French critics of Shakespeare ought to have faced; and perhaps his answer to it is the right one; but it is somehow not entirely satisfactory. We feel more disposed to accede to Hugo's solution of the matter, in the work about to be considered, that in the consideration of supreme artists there can be no comparison: none can be above another, for all are supreme.

But, adds Lamartine, Shakespeare's distinction is that he, alone of all men, has been supreme in both the tragic and the comic. Falstaff is to him the *chef d'œuvre* of the world's comedy. And his varied achievement 'makes him the equal of Pascal after having made him the equal of Molière'. A better eulogy of Shakespeare's natural genius, as apart from his art (if such a distinction can be made, as Lamartine makes it), has seldom been written, than the conclusion of this essay. 'His works . . . were blended of perfection and imperfection; but the man was immense; and, taking him all in all, there have been some more perfect, but perhaps none greater!'

With his vigorous appreciation of Shakespeare's genius—which nevertheless seems to him a strange and alien thing—and his censures upon his lack of art, Lamartine represents the conservative and national side of French criticism. The work entitled *William Shakespeare*, by Victor Hugo, the apostle of medievalism, is that of the pure devotee of Shakespeare, who is found in every modern country and who puts aside nationality before the universality of England's poet.

Perhaps the chief defect of this book, to the student of Shakespearean criticism, is that it deals with almost every subject except Shakespeare. Hugo's view is wide; this book, a series of reflections rather than a continuous argument, is a confession of Hugo's artistic creed, a superb presentment of all his views—the views of a creative genius—upon art and its place in life. It is criticism to the same extent that the Book of Revelation is theology.

The work opens with a short biography of Shakespeare, almost valueless to the modern reader, since the chronology of the plays adopted by Hugo has now been shown to be false. But accuracy of fact is not much more noticeable in Hugo than it was in Voltaire. His statement, elaborated at some length, that 'Shakespeare's life was greatly embittered; he lived perpetually slighted', is no more true than his description of Ben Jonson as 'an envious person, . . . an indifferent comic poet'. His review of Shakespeare's posthumous fame, concluding with references to 'an imbecile, Malone', is equally unfair. But these are not serious defects in this great book. Hugo's criticism is creative, not analytical; and, like all creative work, depends upon imaginative rather than material truth. Hence we shall not expect to find in his work any close and detailed criticism of the particular points in which Shakespeare's genius is displayed. He prefaces his work with a finely conceived parallel between Shakespeare and the sea: no true lover of the sea finds that feeling of fulfilment, which it gives to him, merely in the breaking of a wave, or the foam-flecked crests of a stormy cove; these are details; what speaks to him is the soul of the ocean:

Who hath desired the Sea?—the sight of salt water unbounded?

Such is Hugo's feeling for the vast unfathomable soul of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare is the last of the succession of supreme artists of whom Hugo says, 'Which is the greatest? Every one', for 'supreme art is the reign of equals: there is no primary among masterpieces'. But his list of fourteen supreme artists, from Homer to Shakespeare, is interesting for its inclusions and omissions. Tacitus appears in it, but not Thucydides; Juvenal, but not Virgil. This must surely be a symptom of Hugo's unconscious reaction against the models upon whom classic theorists were always insisting. Scholars of all ages have agreed to rank Thucydides as supreme in history: as Gray said to a friend who had just finished the account of the Sicilian expedition, 'Is it, or is it not, the finest thing you ever read in your life?' And to place Juvenal alongside Homer, and above Virgil, is ludicrous: as well prefer Swift to Milton. These omissions can be explained only by Hugo's instinct not to confess admiration for any author who excelled in perfection of form, whatever his other excellences; for the fame of Virgil and Sophocles (another omission of Hugo's) does not rest mainly upon perfection of form.

A long and eloquent consideration follows of the nature of supreme art and its position in life, and of Aeschylus—the ancient Shakespeare—but, with the beginning of the Second Part, he proceeds to consider Shakespeare himself. Shakespeare's genius is total, all-embracing; he is all imagination ✓ and, after holding up to passionate ridicule the classic insistence upon sobriety and temperance in writing, Hugo adds, 'if ever a man was undeserving of the good character "he is sober", it is most certainly William Shakespeare'. For the poet is Nature; he is 'magnificently simple'. It would seem that Hugo is here echoing, but as praise instead of blame, Lamartine's opinion that while Racine knew how to choose, Shakespeare did not. He has

unfortunately forgotten the valuable distinction he had made, in the Preface to *Cromwell*, between Nature and Art. The great characteristic of Shakespeare is not only the fertility of his imagination, the loftiness and sweep of his mind, but his combination of these qualities with the sternest realization of the actual conditions of human life. His head is in the clouds, but his feet are always on solid earth. And this is in reality the quality of temperance which the eighteenth century demanded: they were right as far as they went, but wrong in thinking that what they demanded was sufficient of itself.

Of Shakespeare's characters Hugo well observes that each is at the same time a type and an individual. 'Types are cases foreseen of God: genius realizes them.' It is true, as he says, that Shylock, besides being a living man, does typify his race and situation to us, as Marlowe's Barabas, even though he lived, does not. Hugo's appreciations of Shakespeare's characters are often expressed so freely, so imaginatively, that it is not very easy for the student of criticism to discover what his conception of the character is; indeed, it is doubtful if he has any other than the general impression of the character, and this is, indeed, all that the reader and appreciator of Shakespeare need have, though to the critic, no doubt, a more detailed impression is also necessary. Of Hamlet he says, 'it is the parricide saying "What do I know?" . . . Hamlet is the supreme tragedy of the human dream.' Hugo perceives, and finely delineates, the sense of the burden of doubt and evil which oppresses Hamlet. 'A kind of cloudy obstacle everywhere surrounds Hamlet.' And yet for Hugo he has, too, that sympathy with ourselves which Hazlitt so well expressed in the words, 'It is we who are Hamlet'.

Brief considerations follow of Othello, Macbeth, and

Lear. Macbeth is 'the hunger of the monster, always possible in man'. Yet at last, says Hugo, 'Nature loses patience, Nature enters into action against Macbeth'. This seems to be the only trace in Hugo of the conception of the moral law of Shakespeare's tragedies—the just and normal order of things, which, however distorted by the evil he portrays, always succeeds in the end in restoring itself and destroying that evil. It is the domination of this moral order in Shakespeare that leads us to deny Hugo's conception of him as 'all nature' and to insist that Shakespeare's reliance on this normality shows the essential sobriety of his imagination.

Othello is 'the night: an immense fatal figure'; beside him is Iago—'evil, the other form of darkness'. These main lines of character are all that Hugo describes; but he makes a true creative criticism in this striking sentence: 'Iago near Othello is the precipice near the landslip. "This way!" he says in a low voice.' This is a fine example of the best kind of Hugo's criticism. It makes us see once more the very figures that Shakespeare conceived.

The drama of King Lear is to Hugo the drama of Cordelia. 'Lear is the occasion for Cordelia: once this figure dreamed of and found, Shakespeare created this drama.' Cordelia is to Hugo the most lovely and divine of all Shakespeare's figures of women. The admiration with which he regards the two great characters, Lear and Cordelia, makes up his whole feeling for the drama. It is, he says, like a cathedral tower, made, with all its ornamentations and its vastness, to support at its summit 'an angel spreading its golden wings'.

This is nearly the sum of the criticism contained in Hugo's great book. Indeed he admits this freely. 'I admire everything, like a fool', he says, and after a list of

incidents which he admires, including the blinding of Gloster, he adds, 'I have no more intelligence than that comes to'. But Hugo's irony is here out of place. However much we admire Shakespeare, this indiscriminate adoration injures rather than advances his fame. To place *The Taming of the Shrew* alongside *Hamlet* is not to eulogize *The Taming of the Shrew*, but to despise *Hamlet*. Of all authors of supreme rank Shakespeare is perhaps the most uneven, and to disregard this fact is to mistake the whole nature of his genius. It is always better to stop 'on this side idolatry'.

It is unfortunate that to Hugo 'criticism' seems to mean 'censure'. 'Look, therefore, for no criticism', he warns his readers, and justly; but it is a warning that the student of criticism must perforce disregard. The section entitled 'criticism'—Part Two, Book Four—is Hugo's final contribution to the struggle between the Classics and Romantics. Hugo well illustrates his point of view—and an admirable one it is—by a brief consideration of the double plots so often employed by Shakespeare. Hugo refuses to join in the condemnation of this device; but neither does he approve it: 'We recognize them, and that is all.' That is, the critic at last occupies the position not of the judge but of the analyst. Hugo no doubt adopts too far-fetched an argument when he says that the double plot is due to the duality of medieval life; modern criticism, without going so far afield, finds the reason for it in the theatrical conditions under which Shakespeare worked. But he proceeds to true and valuable criticism when he repeats his demand for the abolition of all imitation, even of Shakespeare: 'there is no reverting to him'; 'imitation is always barren and bad'. And he insists once more upon the necessity of the poet to appeal to the whole people—to

'pander to the mob'. And this leads on to the final portion of the book, which considers the relation of literature to life, and which, in spite of its eloquence and the elevation of its ideas, has little importance to the student of Shakespeare.

Such is Victor Hugo's great work, which, considered merely as criticism, certainly merits the contemptuous references made to it by other critics. Lamartine called Hugo's extravagant admiration 'silly', and Sir Sidney Lee says 'Lamartine's work is a saner appreciation'. This is hardly just, for Lamartine, when he did admire, did so with a fervour that nearly equalled Hugo's; but his approval was accompanied by illogical censures. His work is not 'sane appreciation' any more than Hugo's. He does seem to have more feeling for Shakespeare's consummate mastery in detail than Hugo, whose lofty view failed to focus itself upon Shakespeare's superb artistry. But against this must be placed the judicial outlook which still persists in his criticism, and which Hugo has put aside. And, above all, to consider Hugo's work specifically as criticism is unfair. Shakespeare has little more part in it than Hiero or another of his patrons had in the odes of Pindar. He inspires this great flight of imagination, which elevates him to that supremacy allotted to him by no other critic in France. Hugo is the first Frenchman who has allowed to Shakespeare absolute primacy in the world's art, alongside Homer and Dante, in that height which, as Hugo says, 'is the region of equals'.

The fervent admiration of the greatest literary man in France may be said to have concluded the dispute about Shakespeare. Henceforward the position of French criticism is that enunciated by Hugo. They neither approve nor blame Shakespeare's peculiarities: they accept them.

True criticism, begun by Guizot, is at last general. And in considering the Romantic period, which we have now completed, as a whole, it may be said that France owes a great debt to Shakespeare. To his influence, more than to any other save that of the German Romantics, is due the emancipation of the French stage from its outworn conventions, which gave to France at the end of the nineteenth century the position which her admirers have claimed as her right—the primacy, for the moment, in the drama of the world.



## CONCLUSION

As the knowledge of Shakespeare advances, and as the opinion of different nations about him tends to arrive at a common position, criticism becomes merged into scholarship. It is becoming daily more difficult to find

Two points in Hamlet's soul  
Unseized by the Germans yet.

The imagination of Lamb, bursting into prose poetry that is worthy even of its subject, is replaced by the researches of antiquaries among documents and texts. Their discoveries may be chronicled, but not criticized save by another scholar who has traversed the same ground. The historian of criticism—of the progress through the years of the ideas of critics towards the position upon which all modern critics agree—has no place at these deliberations. Moreover, though appreciation of literature may, as we have seen, be coloured by prejudices of all kinds, scholarship, like science, is impersonal and international. Hence it can be no part of the present inquiry to consider in detail the work of French scholars upon Shakespeare in recent years. We have traced France's career towards the goal, and all that remains is to indicate what that goal is, and how far, if at all, it differs from that which English criticism has reached.

Shakespeare is now the possession of France, as of all the world, as much as of England. Numerous translations of his works have been made, and it is probably true to say that he is better known in France than any French author is in England. His plays, in some form or other,

appear frequently on the Parisian stage. And it is well to be wary before passing an unthinking censure on the mangling of Shakespeare that must be done before he is fit for Paris. When a play of Shakespeare is produced exactly as Shakespeare wrote it, in London itself, it becomes a matter of note: 'astronomers foretell it; it is prodigious, there will be some change', as Thersites says. If *Hamlet* is performed without Fortinbras and *The Tempest* without the opening scene—and both examples are from my own experience—we are not so far from the French who, besides removing Shakespeare's words, add some of their own. English taste to-day is not so different from the taste of Paris as both are from that of Shakespeare. But Shakespeare himself has exercised upon England a constant influence, and this enables us to appreciate certain of his characteristics which displease French taste, and which, to be honest, would displease us in any other author. At a recent revival of *Othello* in Paris, the scene of Desdemona's death had just opened when a lady rose from her seat, murmuring, 'I cannot bear this', and left the theatre. In the past, as we have seen, the French certainly were more chary of violent action on the stage than were the English. But it is doubtful if the distinction exists to-day—except in relation to Shakespeare. An English audience can sit through *Othello* with true enjoyment; but it is very doubtful if anything else, equally harrowing to the feelings, would obtain success. We have been brought up to Shakespeare, and the French have not; there lies one great source of our different outlook upon him.

But, with all the allowance that can be made for other causes, we are finally brought to see that it is national outlook that must explain the differences that have existed, and still exist, between French and English criticisms of

Shakespeare. Taine, though he falls outside the scope of the present review, may be cited for an example of this.

Of the speech of Leontes, playing with Mamillius, Taine remarks with surprise, 'He dares be trivial'. Fifty years before we should have said that this was the neo-classic censuring the lack of decorum and tragic dignity. And Taine is a classicist just in so far as French thought does incline in that direction. The French mind tends to organization, to rule and order. They take more kindly to bureaucracy than we do. They like things duly arranged in their proper places. The Englishman works by rule of thumb, knowing that as he has a perfectly clear idea of his aim, the details are bound to fall into place. Now, in the scene of Leontes and Mamillius, the Frenchman finds, and dislikes, the superficial contradiction of a great king talking with a child; the Englishman likes it, because it shows him that the great king is something more than a king—a father and a man. To us contradiction does not carry confusion, but sympathy and therefore understanding; but this is no part of a Frenchman's aim. French ridicule, as Guizot said, is meant to hurt; English humour is based not on malice, but on understanding and affection. The Frenchman desires to contemplate, the Englishman to comprehend.

But if the quality of the French mind excludes it from perfect sympathy with that of Shakespeare, we cannot justly impute any lack of enthusiasm to defective critical judgement. Perhaps in England we sometimes tend to forget criticism in adoration. The fault is pardonable, for not only is Shakespeare the greatest glory of his country, but he is the most truly national of all her poets. In foreign countries the English are regarded sometimes as mad, sometimes as merely stupid. That is because they combine the qualities of imagination and of practical sense,

losing neither the first like the purely Teuton races nor the second like those of the South. It is the secret of their success; and it is the secret of Shakespeare's. No poet has risen to greater heights than he, but never, in his loftiest moments, does he forget that he is a man writing for men. His own character displays the same contrast, to which he gave life, in a thousand different forms, in each of his characters; that method of contrast, of balance, which dominates the art of Shakespeare, is, as we have seen, alien to the orderly mind of France. There is very little in Shakespeare that to us seems out of place. It is the marvellous quality of his art that the vigour and profusion of his imagination is always ordered and controlled by the truth of the great conception that sets it in motion, and by the consummate mastery of every detail. But this is not the simplicity of classic art, and it is to that the French mind still inclines. Yet, if they cannot admit with us the supremacy of his art, they can do noble homage to his genius, as Lamartine did. 'Ascend the stage', says Taine, 'and contemplate the whole scene: . . . do you not see the poet behind the crowd of his creatures?' Yes, replies Alexandre Dumas—in the phrase which I have already called the noblest appreciation of Shakespeare ever contained in a single sentence—for 'After God, Shakespeare has created most'.

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